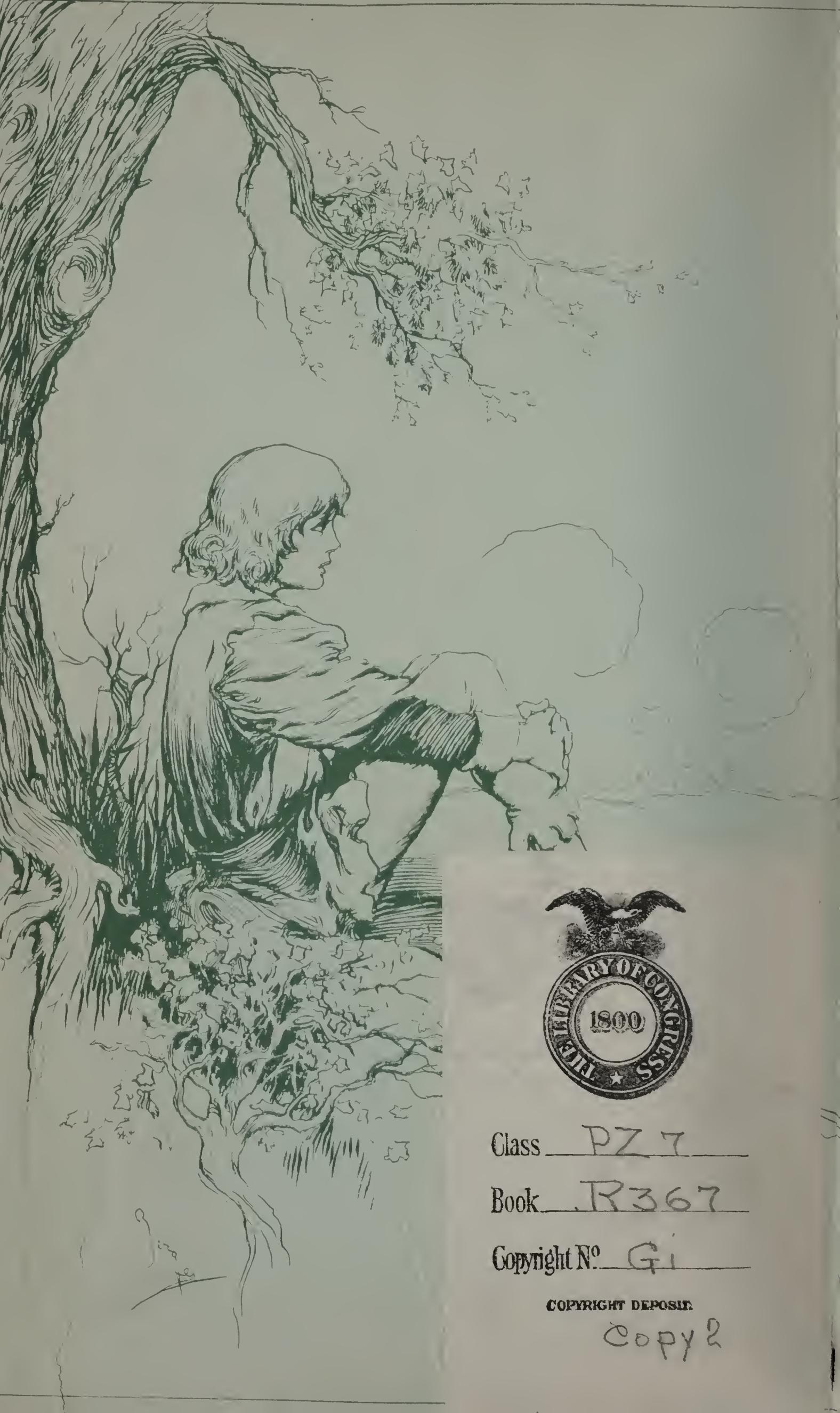


GILES OF THE STAR



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GILES OF THE STAR

The Boy Who Would Be a Knight



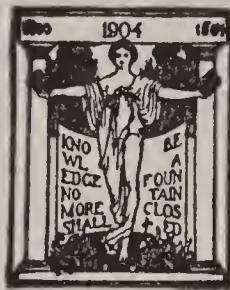
GUILBERT'S SWORD FLEW FROM HIS HAND, ONLY TO FALL
HARMLESSLY AT GILES'S FEET.—*Page 57.*

GILES OF THE STAR

The Boy Who Would Be a Knight

By
REBECCA RICE

Illustrated by
W. M. BERGER



BOSTON
LOTHROP, LEE & SHEPARD CO.

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GILES OF THE STAR

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GILES OF THE STAR

CHAPTER I

CONCERNING KNIGHTHOOD

As the clear yet distant sound of the hunter's horn sounded far below on the road that led up to the old castle of Avalon, a twelve-year-old boy sprang to the top of Overlook Rock that he might better see the gay cavalcade of knights and ladies as they swept around the base of the hill. Since the coming of Lord Alford several months before, many such gay parties had gone from the grim, gray castle, past Overlook Rock to the plain below.

Giles often wished that he might be on the rock when they rode past it, but that was impossible. They were in hiding, he and Anselm, the hermit, and in no way must he jeopardize the safety of his friend's secret.

Why they were in hiding, the boy did not know. In some respects it did not seem like hiding at all, for both he and Anselm went to the village at will, talked freely with the peasants that lived there, and roamed about the countryside without being afraid. It was only when they were near the cell which was their home that they were careful not

to be seen. The whole countryside knew the hermit Anselm and the boy Giles, but no one knew where they made their home.

Again came the stirring notes of the hunter's horn. The boy reveled in the sound. He loved to watch the easy canter of the spirited horses with their beautiful glittering bridles and gayly colored saddles. He liked to see the tossing manes and tails of the splendid chargers on which the knights rode. How he envied Lord Alford the possession of his splendid mount! How wonderful it would be to ride off to deeds of valor on a steed like that! Giles was sure that he would not bother with silly little hunting expeditions. He would ride off proudly to do battle with some fierce outlaw that was harrying the land, or else to slay a fire-breathing dragon if he could find any such. Above all else, Giles longed to become a knight.

"If I were the son of a knight, I would be trained for knighthood," he thought bitterly, as the gay company passed from his sight around a bend in the path. "I would have a splendid black charger with crimson-and-gold trappings. I would follow Richard, my king, to the land of the infidel to take the Holy City from the hands of the Mohammedans."

He hugged his knees and gave himself up to day-dreaming. "If this were a wishing rock," he mused, "I would wish for adventure. Nothing

exciting ever happens to me. I would wish that I might get a chance to prove that I was worthy of knighthood, peasant though I am."

He sighed deeply, then, thinking of the work that lay before him, he slipped carefully from one notch which had been cut in the rock to another in the side of the cliff away from the path to the castle. Behind him towered the huge rock that lay between the rest of the world and his secret home. On one side, ran the path that led to Avalon. Along this road, people passed every day, but only to the chosen few was the secret of Anselm's cell known. To any one coming up the path, the top of the rock would have appeared inaccessible. Beyond this rock was the home of the hermit.

Hidden from above by an overhanging precipice and from below by tall trees and another precipice, with the only way to reach it a dangerous climb over the rock, it was no wonder that its existence was not only unknown to the villagers, but to the inmates of the castle as well.

Far above the cell, perched like an eagle's eyrie in some mountain fastness, stood the beautiful old castle of Avalon. It was not large, as castles of the time went, but it was so well built, and so strongly fortified both by its position and workmanship that it would take a clever enemy to force it to surrender. For twelve years the old castle

had been very quiet and somber. No gay parties had ridden to or from the castle. No splendid banquets had been held in the big hall. A double tragedy had robbed the castle of both knight and lady in a single week. The castle had come into the baby hands of their little daughter, Millicent, now a delicate girl of twelve springtimes.

She, with the exception of a renegade uncle who had been outlawed by King Richard, was the only one left to bear the proud old name. But Richard was far away, fighting in a distant land. His brother John was left to rule in England. When Roderick, whom Richard had appointed guardian to the little Millicent, died, her uncle, the wicked Alford, returned to Avalon with authority from the king's brother, John, to be guardian to Millicent. Since his arrival there had been gay doings at the castle.

As Giles picked his way along the narrow ledge that led to the cell, he thought for the hundredth time what a pity it was that the Lady Millicent had been born a girl. How a boy would enjoy the training he would receive to make him a knight! How he would enjoy wandering about the grim old armory with its lifelike coats of mail, daggers, swords, lances, and shields!

"I am glad I'm a boy," he thought as he turned the last corner. "It must be terrible to be a girl. I would rather be a peasant boy than a little lady."

A tall man was standing in front of the cell waiting for him. He was young and strong-looking, but dressed in the plain, coarse robe of a hermit. He was standing very erect, looking down the valley. He, too, had heard the ringing call of the horn. Had it spoken to his heart as well? There was a strained, worried look upon his face as he turned to greet Giles.

The boy thought that Anselm would make as good a knight as the best of them if he were dressed in helmet and coat of mail. He looked more like a soldier about to go into battle than like a hermit. Again came the clear, ringing call of the horn. It was as faint and as far away as if fairy-blown. Anselm smiled understandingly at the enthusiasm that he saw on the boy's face.

"I can see that the bugle has spoken to your heart also, lad," he said, laying his hand upon the boy's shoulder. "It is well, for the call of chivalry to the heart of a youth brings all the best in him to life."

"I want to be a knight!" cried out the boy passionately. "I want to carry a sword for the right, and ride off to do noble deeds. I want to do deeds of valor, but I am only a peasant. I am worse off than most of the peasant boys, for I have neither father nor mother. Why cannot we lads of the village and countryside be knights? We can be loyal to our king. We can stand bravely up for

what is right. Why can we never be more than men-at-arms or simple farmers?"

Anselm looked down with pride at the manly boy at his side. "The time has nearly come," he said to himself, but what he said aloud was, "Do you know what knighthood really means, or has your eye been dazzled only by the glittering lance and the prancing steed?"

"I think I do," replied Giles simply.

"It means far more than wielding a fine sword and bearing a fine banner. It means following the king through defeat as well as victory, crushing the wrong under the heel of iron, and raising up the humble and downtrodden. It means the sacrifice of life itself for the right, if need be. It is not easy to be a knight, Giles."

Giles's fine gray eyes had kindled and, instinctively, he had straightened up until he stood tall and arrow-like.

"That is the kind of knight that I would like to be," replied Giles. "It does not matter about the fine horse and the trappings of crimson and gold, although it would be a fine thing to have them as well. I could do without the fine castle, but," he spoke sadly, "I was born a peasant."

Anselm raised his arm and pointed to the majestic castle that crowned the hill. It was stately and beautiful in the morning light. There was an intensity in the man's face that brought an answer-

ing thrill to the heart of the boy who stood before him.

"You were born in the shadow of Avalon," the hermit said impressively. "Your life belongs to her. When you are a man, you will fight under her standard. Were there a lord of the castle, you would fight by his side, but there is no lord. There is naught but a helpless little lass that may, in time, need your service even more than the lord of the castle would. You can be a knight, Giles, a knight in deed and in spirit if not in reality, and remember, lad, that before the throne of God if you are a knight in heart and action, there you are a knight in reality, as well."

Giles's heart beat faster. It seemed as if his friend's voice were speaking directly to his heart. With the sun turning his hair to gold and with his head thrown back, he looked very handsome as he stood there.

"I will be that kind of a knight," he said earnestly. "On my word of honor, I promise it."

The hermit looked down at the boy whom he loved so dearly, looked keenly into the straightforward, gray eyes that mirrored a brave heart. He looked deeply, and was satisfied.

Together they entered the hermit's cell to begin the work of the day. It was a curious place. A waterfall coming over the precipice above hid the entrance. By skirting close to the cliff one might

enter without getting wet, but no one would guess from the appearance of the place that the waterfall hid a secret door. Giles thought it a wonderful hiding-place. It was all very natural,—nothing to suggest the work of man.

Behind the waterfall a small room had been made. The action of water had helped shape the cavity, but men's hands had enlarged it and lined it with wooden wainscoting. Inside the cell were two pallets on the floor and a huge oaken chest.

It was too dark in the cell for fine work. Anselm had made a table for himself which he used out-of-doors. From the curiously carved oaken chest he took a precious volume, the Bible. Books in those days were almost unheard of. Every book was copied, word for word, by the hand of some monk. Handwritten and beautifully illustrated in rare colors on snowy vellum, the finished Bible represented the life-work of a dozen men. At the beginning of each chapter, twined about the first letter, were intricate designs, scrolls of blue and gold. At the ends of the chapters were triangular tailpieces, exquisitely wrought.

Anselm was painstakingly copying the book of Psalms on new pieces of vellum. He was hard at work upon a beautiful initial letter in crimson and gold. Giles was painfully learning to read and write Latin. It was difficult and up-hill work, and only the fact that he was learning to do some-

thing that no one else in the village knew kept him at work on it.

"Why is it that not another boy in all the village is learning this stuff?" he asked after a few minutes of hard work. "None of the grown people know it, either."

"There are many of the knights who can neither read nor write," replied Anselm, bending low over his work.

"Why is it that you are teaching it to me?" asked Giles. "Do you want me to go into the church or copy books as you do?"

"It is sometimes wise for others beside churchmen to read and write," replied Anselm. "Suppose you were in great danger and I could not come to you. If I could write and you could read, I could send a warning to you, or if you were away from me, sick, wounded, or unhappy, then you could write a letter that would bring me to your side. Can you not see how a few words of writing might benefit you?"

"Yes," agreed Giles. "Are there other reasons why I should learn to read?"

Anselm held up the big, beautiful Bible and opened it to the story of Joseph. He read a little of it in Latin and then translated it into English. Giles listened intently, for the story of Joseph was one of his favorites. At last Anselm put the big book on the table.

"In this book before you, are many treasures," he said solemnly. "To most of the world, this treasure-box is sealed by ignorance. If you can read, the key to this treasure is in your hands."

"Your work is making a treasure of what is lying under your hand," said Giles, admiringly, leaving his bench to look over his teacher's shoulder. "I think that scroll is more beautiful than any I have seen you do before."

Anselm shook his head, rose, and reentered his cell. From the depths of his chest he took a roll of parchment carefully wrapped in old linen.

"Every great house has its coat of arms, lad," he said. "Each coat of arms shows some symbol which has a deep meaning for its owner. It is the symbol of what he wants his life to be. Here before you is the coat of arms that is emblazoned in the great house on the hill."

Giles watched breathlessly while the hermit unrolled the linen covering. There before him, glowing with crimson and gold, was the Avalon coat of arms. At its center was an unsheathed sword, while beneath it, in crimson and gold, was inscribed a Latin word.

"The sword is the symbol of readiness," explained Anselm, pointing it out. "Below is the white flower of innocence and purity. The crimson flowers about the white stand for the dauntless bravery of those who have been ready to die to

uphold some ideal of right. Men have died to keep that flower unstained."

Giles went back to his seat thinking deeply, and, strange to say, it was of Latin that he thought. It had given him a great deal of satisfaction to know, without asking, the meaning of the Latin motto upon the coat of arms, *Servo*, "I serve." That was a motto worth striving for.

"If I am to be a knight, even a make-believe one, I ought to have a coat of arms." He spoke this thought to Anselm, adding that he wished he had a fine motto also.

"*Semper verus*," replied Anselm in Latin.

"*Semper* means 'always,'" said Giles reflectively. "I don't know the meaning of the rest of it."

"The whole motto means 'Always true,'" responded Anselm. "It is a good motto. Consider it well."

With a sharp stick Giles traced the words on the hard earth. It was a good motto and he was proud of it, but he still lacked his coat of arms. A coat of arms was made up of pictures which meant something to their owner.

"I'll make one up," thought the boy. "I will have a star for the center of it."

He had often lain out under the stars at night, looking up into the dark-blue vault above. Somehow he had such big hopes as he lay there looking

up at them that it seemed as if a star belonged to him. Inside the outline of a six-pointed star he decided to put smaller symbols. Quickly he scratched the rude outline of a star about his motto.

"A knight is true first to God," he thought, as he drew the sun in the uppermost point. "He is true to Christ." In another point he drew a cross. "After that he must be true to the king of the land. For him I will draw a crown. I would put a lion, for people say that he has the strength and courage of a lion, but a lion is a very difficult beast to draw, as I have never seen one. Richard, Cœur de Lion, heart of a lion! What would I not give if I might earn a name like that!"

For some time he pondered over a fitting symbol for Avalon, and at last decided upon the sword. Opposite to the sword he drew the white flower of innocence. And as he could think of no fitting symbol for the remaining point, he called Anselm's attention to it.

"The star stands for the feeling that I have when I hear the bugle," he explained shyly. "I don't know what to call it, but it makes me want to ride off and do something wonderful and heroic. The motto you gave me. I wish to be *semper verus* to the things that these smaller devices stand for, God and the church, as King Richard is true to them; King Richard himself, for I will never call

John king; Avalon; and the little Lady Millicent. I have not decided upon the last point yet, but I should like it to stand for something very fine."

"Let it be for the record of your first knightly deed," proposed Anselm. There was a mist in the man's eyes as he looked upon the crude drawing at his feet, but there was a lovely smile about his lips as he replied, "I will make for you a copy of your coat of arms. On snowy vellum and with rare colors will I make it, that you may always have a reminder of your vows, taken this day. There is a need for knighthood in Avalon, for the times are troublous. There is a need for the knighthood of spirit, which far exceeds the worth of the knighthood of blood. I do not know, but I fear that there will be work, and work right soon, for all those who are loyal in heart to Lady Millicent of Avalon. There is danger to her in the very air about her. I believe that Alford is here to cause trouble."

Giles looked at Anselm in open-mouthed wonder. Never had he seen him so excited.

"You have never spoken to me like this before," said the boy wonderingly. "Why do you think that there is danger? In what way will it affect us? Shall we not live here as we have always lived? Tell me what you mean."

Anselm's eyes were fixed upon the huge, towering castle above them. There was a grim expres-

sion about his lips, and his eyes were stern. Giles hardly knew his friend in this mood. It was just as if he had suddenly become some one else. Giles was strangely stirred.

"Why do you think that Lord Alford means to make trouble?" asked the boy.

"I will tell to you the tale of the old castle, that you may know of the danger that overhangs our little lady," replied the man. "It is well that you should know at least a part of the tale."

Giles drew nearer. What story was there that he did not know of the old castle? Ever since babyhood he had begged and received tales of it.

"Years ago the duke, Lady Millicent's grandfather, was the Lord of Avalon. He had two sons, Giles and Alford. Giles was the elder, which was fortunate, for he was all that a young knight should be, brave, honorable, and kind. He married a very beautiful and high-born lady, who was the only daughter of the Lord of Lichester. They loved each other devotedly and were very happy, although the families of Lichester and Avalon had been at war. Shortly after the marriage the old duke became sick. The following year he died, leaving, as is the custom, both title and riches to the elder son. Only a few weeks after his father's death, the new duke was found in the forest dead. He had been shot with an arrow.

"The very night that he was brought back to the

castle, the Lady Millicent was born. Her lovely mother died the same night. The shock was too much for her. Every one thought that Alford would be made the new duke. They were much surprised when the king ruled against it, putting one of his own knights as guardian to the little lady."

"Why was not Lord Alford made the guardian?" questioned Giles.

"Lord Alford was accused of treachery to the king and to his own brother," replied Anselm. "One of the knights of the castle mistrusted him, but he did not realize that he would kill his brother. It was discovered that he was guilty of that as well as of plotting against the king himself. The same man, Sir Benedict, discovered the plot and reported it to the king. Alford would have hanged upon the gallows had he not fled from Avalon. Now he has returned. The guardian that the late King Henry chose is now dead. Alford has returned to take his place."

"But," objected Giles, "is he not still a fugitive? Did the king pardon him?"

"No," returned Anselm, "but King Henry is dead, King Richard is fighting Saladin in the Holy Land, and John rules England till Richard's return. Richard hates Alford, but John," here Anselm's voice sank to a whisper, "John is known to favor the enemies of Richard."

Giles's hands clenched. His eyes blazed. Right well he knew that John was disloyal to Richard. So well did he like being left in power that he strengthened his position in all ways possible. He made friends with those who were known to be disloyal to the king. He tried to make trouble between good friends.

"Alford is well liked by King John. He is not afraid that the king will deal severely with him so long as he brings him in money. I fear he means harm to the little Lady of Avalon," went on Anselm. "There may be nothing that we can do, but ——"

"We will be ready," finished Giles.

Again they took up their work, but with only half-hearted interest. Giles was thinking deeply of the tale that he had just heard. Knights always helped fair ladies when they were in danger. He had heard of many deeds of valor from their men-at-arms who often gathered at the tavern. Anselm had told him tales of King Arthur, and of the good old days when knights were brave and ladies fair.

In imagination he fought most gallantly for the Lady of Avalon. It would be a trial by challenge, a fight to the bitter end. Clad in armor of finest steel links he would ride against the wicked Alford. His horse would be a coal-black charger, a horse without compare. With shield before him

and lance poised, he would charge against the enemy. There would be a terrific shock. Alford's lance would be splintered so that he would have to get a new one. Then his horse would wheel and charge. Across the field they would gallop. Again would come the fierce impact. Alford would totter in his saddle. With a terrible cry he would fall beneath the very hoofs of his own prancing steed.

Then would come a mighty shout from the lips of all beholders. The victor's crown would be placed upon his head by the hand of Lady Millicent herself. Her crimson-and-gold favor would adorn his arm.

It was a pleasant make-believe. The boy's eyes were dreamy as he looked off into the distance. There was a half smile on his face as he thought of the distant victory that should be his. He did not hear the grating noise in the cell behind him. He could not see the panel which slipped out of place. A slight exclamation of fright and surprise made him turn hastily. There at the entrance of the cell stood the prettiest little girl that Giles had ever seen.

CHAPTER II

LADY MILLICENT

IF an angel had stepped right out of heaven, Giles could not have been more amazed. With wide-open mouth and eyes he stared at her. Blue and gold! She looked like a beautiful painting, with the coloring of Anselm's scroll. Her dress was of the rich blue that is sometimes seen in the paintings of the Madonna, and over it her golden hair fell in curling waves to her shoulders. In her hand she held a waxen taper, still lighted. She was about as old as Giles himself.

For several moments the two children stared at each other in wonder. There was startled questioning in the soft blue eyes of the girl, and blank amazement and wonder in the boy's regard. Seeing nothing to alarm her, the girl stepped forward toward Giles and spoke. "You look at me as though you thought that I was a spirit, but I am not," she said. "I am here by an accident. Can you tell me where I am, and how I may return to the castle? I am the Lady Millicent."

That she was the Lady Millicent, Giles had already guessed. He had seen her many times before, but always at a distance, and never face to face. He was horribly embarrassed, for he was



THERE AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE CELL STOOD THE PRETTIEST
LITTLE GIRL THAT GILES HAD EVER SEEN.—*Page 25.*

not used to girls. He knew that she was a lady born, and did not know how to address her. It was Anselm who replied to her question.

"I am Anselm, the hermit," he said quietly. "Giles is my comrade. It will be best that you return to your castle by the way you left it, for it would never do to betray the secret of the passage to other members of the castle. It is one of the secrets of the family of Avalon."

Millicent shivered. "I suppose that you are right," she admitted, "but I am afraid of the dark, gloomy passage. My torch showed me only enough to frighten me. I saw ugly spiders hanging from the ceiling, and a huge gray rat crossed my path."

"I will return with you," said Giles, finally finding the use of his tongue. "I am not afraid of rats or spiders." Then, curiosity getting the better of him, he blurted out, "Won't you tell us how you managed to find your way to this place? I never knew that there was such a passage."

"Yes," she replied, "I will tell you, although if you had not seen me come through the secret way I could not speak of it, as I made a promise to old Roderick that I would keep my knowledge a secret. It was Roderick who showed me how to open the way. I think he knew that he was about to die, for one day, when there was no one in the hall, he bolted the doors and showed me the hidden spring.

He told me that it was built many years ago, so that, in case the castle was attacked, the lord of the castle might escape or get food from the outside world. He said that very few people knew of it. He even said that I must not tell the secret to my uncle, in case he returned. I promised that I would guard the secret faithfully, and now you know."

She looked so sad that Giles was afraid she was going to cry, so he said quickly, "You can trust me. I will not tell any one your secret."

There was a very curious yet tender smile on Anselm's face as he replied, "Neither of us will betray you."

Millicent looked relieved and wiped her eyes on the hem of her blue gown. "He said I was to use it in case of great danger."

"Were you in great danger?" asked Giles eagerly. His eyes were ashine with interest. Perhaps this would be his first chance to do a brave, knightly deed. Even Anselm's face failed to hide his interest, for he had been worried about the safety of the girl, but she only laughed lightly.

"No," she confessed. "It was only curiosity. I wanted to find out to what kind of a place it would lead me. Instead of going to ride this morning with the rest of the party from the castle, I made an excuse to remain at home. It displeased the fine lady nurse that my uncle brought

with him from London, I can tell you." She stopped short, for Anselm had uttered a sharp quick exclamation.

"Is Nanny no longer your nurse?" he asked, and again a mist of tears came into the little girl's eyes.

"Uncle Alford sent her away just the other day," she replied sadly. "He said that she was not fine enough for me, so he brought me another. I do not love the new one nearly so well as I loved old Nanny, and I know that she does not love me. All she thinks of is the men servants of the castle. That is why she was so angry when I did not go to ride, but it was all right when I told her that I should not need her all morning. When there was no one in the hall I slipped my hand beneath the tapestry and pushed back the panel. It was so dark that I lighted one of the torches. A flight of stone steps led down into the ground. It was so very dark that I decided to go only down a step or two, but the panel slipped back into place the moment I let it go, and when I tried to open it I found I was locked out."

"Did you call out?" asked Anselm.

Millicent looked reproachful.

"Do you think I would be the first to betray that secret?" she said.

"What did you do?" asked Giles, who had been hanging upon her words.

"Cried at first," she admitted. "Then I decided to go down the stairs and find out what was at the other end. It was very dark, and I was afraid. The first set of steps went straight down, but after that they wound first one way and then another. At last I came to a place where the passage went along on the same level. At the end of it I found another panel, but this one slipped easily. When I pushed it open I found myself in your cave under the waterfall. You won't tell any one about it?" she finished anxiously.

"My child," said Anselm gravely, "I knew of that secret passage before you were born. I was only a boy then, and your father's younger friend. Together we stumbled upon it, and I promised your father on my word of honor that I would keep his secret. I promise the same to you."

That promise satisfied Millicent. She turned to face the entrance of the cell. "How well it is hidden!" she commented. Then her quick eyes caught sight of the blue-and-gold design on which Anselm was working. She uttered a little cry of delight. Nothing would satisfy her but seeing him actually at work on the delicate scroll. At Giles's request he showed her the Avalon coat of arms and told her the meaning of the various symbols upon it. The whole design delighted her, for she had been taught from a baby to revere the name of Avalon, with all that the name meant.

"Ask Giles to show you his, and get him to tell you what it means," suggested Anselm with a smile. Millicent looked at Giles in wonder. Why should a boy dressed in the faded blue of a peasant garb have a coat of arms? It was true that there was something different in Giles's bearing from that of most country boys whom she had seen, and yet he was so poor that his only home was a cell on the mountain side, and he was dressed in the blue homespun of a peasant.

"Have you a coat of arms, Giles?" she asked, much mystified. Giles blushed hotly. He wished that Anselm had not mentioned the matter. Of course, his coat of arms was just a make-believe, but it was a dear make-believe, and he could not bear to have it ridiculed.

"It is not a real one," he explained in much embarrassment. "I made it up. I have always wanted to be a knight and do brave and knightly deeds, but peasant boys do not have chances to become knights. I cannot become a real knight, but Anselm told me that I could be a knight at heart and in deed, and, because knights have crests and mottoes to help them to remember to act in all ways as a knight should act, I made one up to help me."

Millicent knelt down by the rough drawing upon the ground. There was no ridicule on her sweet face as she bent over it. There was only

warm interest and sympathy. Anselm, looking on, was pleased by what he saw.

"Here is a star, the sun, a motto, a cross, a sword, and a flower," she said. "Please tell me what each means."

"The big star stands for the feeling that I have inside me, the wish to be a knight and to do brave deeds," explained Giles enthusiastically, eagerness getting the best of shyness. "*Semper verus* means 'always true.' I want to be true to God, as good King Richard was true to Him, and then true to King Richard himself."

"But King Richard is dead," said Millicent. "He was drowned. Uncle Alford says that I must call John king."

"I will never call John king," replied Giles hotly. "He has worked against his brother, trying to stir up trouble among the nobles. He wanted Richard to die so he might get the throne."

"Old Roderick used to love Richard," said Millicent thoughtfully. Then she turned back to the picture on the ground. She put her finger upon the crown, pleased that she could read meaning into the symbols before her.

"I know that the sword stands for Avalon," she said. "It is the same as on my coat of arms."

"Giles has promised always to be true to Avalon," put in Anselm. "You can trust him, for already he has sworn fealty to you."

"Thank you, Giles," replied Millicent simply. It was the custom of all those living on land belonging to a knight to promise him their services in time of danger and need. This was called swearing fealty. Millicent felt very grown-up, and she liked Giles even better than before.

"The white flower is a part of my coat of arms," she said. "It means purity."

For some time they talked about the gallant deeds of knighthood. Millicent told Giles about the life at the castle. It was all very fascinating to the boy who, for years, had longed for castle training. She told him about the armory where coats of mail, spears, lances, and swords were kept.

"I do not like the place," she told him. "It is dreadfully dark there, and the empty coats of mail standing about look like grim warriors."

They talked of King Richard, and Millicent's eyes grew moist when they spoke of his death.

"Roderick used to tell me wonderful stories of his bravery. He wanted to follow him to the Holy Land. Oh, it was terrible that he, the hope of all England, should be drowned on the way back to his kingdom! I love to talk of the bravery of King Richard, but I dare not mention him in my uncle's hearing, for he hated Richard and was loyal to John, even when Richard was alive."

Anselm and Giles exchanged glances. They were both thinking of their conversation before

Millicent came through the secret passage, for every word she said verified it.

"Sir Roderick used to love King Richard, and I loved him, too. He said that some day I would realize all that he had done for me, but I know that Uncle Alford hates him. He said that John would be a better king than Richard because he was always in England, but my guardian did not like John. He said that he was disloyal both to his country and brother. When I told Uncle Alford what Sir Roderick said, he was furious. He swore horribly, and said I must never mention Sir Roderick's name in his presence."

An almost frightened expression came into her face at the recollection which Giles and Anselm were quick to see. Giles very much wanted to know what Lord Alford had said to frighten her so badly, but he did not consider it a polite question to ask.

"It must be great fun to have so much going on at the castle," he said after a moment's hesitation. A wistful expression came into Millicent's pretty eyes.

"I—I don't think I like the change very much," she confessed slowly. "My guardian, Sir Roderick, used to love me, and my nurse loved me, but Uncle Alford said that she was too old-fashioned, and he sent her away. He has sent away all the old servants that cared for me, and that I cared for. My

new nurse is far more interested in the men servants than she is in me."

"Do you care for your uncle?" said Anselm bluntly. Millicent looked at him inquiringly, and hesitated. It was a very hard question to answer truthfully and politely. Besides, it would never do to confess to these strangers, kind as they were, that she could not bear her only uncle on her father's side of the family, and that she quivered with fear whenever his dark, sinister eyes looked at her.

"He brought me a fine puppet from London town," she said after a moment's pause. It was an evasive answer, but Anselm was satisfied. He had seen the look of dislike and perplexity that crossed her face, and he felt reasonably sure that his fears concerning her were justified. Her only safety lay in the fact that Lord Alford could get what he wanted by simply taking control at Avalon, and that, to do this, it was not necessary to harm her. Still her gentle-eyed goodness and purity must be a continual reproach to him. Anselm determined to keep a careful watch upon Alford.

"You must remain here no longer," he said at length, rising. "They will miss you and begin to search."

"They would never find me here," she replied confidently.

"No," replied Giles thoughtfully, "but if they

do miss you they are apt to ask questions that would be hard to answer."

She nodded, for the truth of his words was very plain. "How am I going to get back?" she asked. "When the panel closed, I tried to open it, but it seemed locked."

"Giles and I will take you to the sliding door," replied Anselm. "I know where to put my finger upon the spring on this side of the door. We must go quietly, promising not to talk, for we might be heard by some one inside the hall. It will be necessary to be very quiet and listen carefully when we reach the door for, if any one is in the hall, you must not pass through. Do you agree?"

"Yes, indeed," answered both children. Millicent turned impulsively to Anselm and Giles.

"You have been very kind to me," she said gratefully. "May I come again?"

Anselm shook his head regretfully. "It would be risking too much for a very little. Come to us if you ever find yourself in danger. Both Giles and I would give our lives to serve you."

A rush of cold damp air struck them as they entered the narrow passage. Even Giles had to stoop to get through the low, narrow opening. Anselm drew the panel close behind him for, although he did not expect any one to enter the cell, he was always cautious.

Giles looked about him curiously. It was evi-

dent that this tunnel had once been the underground bed of a brook. Giles made up his mind to ask Anselm if this was the case, and if this was the old bed of the stream of water that gushed over the mouth of the cell. Perhaps the men who had cut that underground passage had changed the bed of the brook in order that they might use its old bed for their tunnel.

The walls of the passage were of grim, gray rock that, in places, oozed water and were clothed with clammy green slime. It was no wonder that Millicent was glad when they began to mount the stairs. Anselm preceded the children, carrying in his hand the lighted torch. He held up a warning hand and then slid back the panel a few inches. There was no sound as it moved. The thick tapestry that hung over the opening hid the movement from any who might be in the room. As they stood there listening breathlessly, they heard the sound of a man's voice. It was the voice of Lord Alford.

CHAPTER III

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT

THERE was not a sound from behind the tapestry. Had the three crouching behind the curtain been marble statues they could hardly have been more silent. Again came the voice of Lord Alford, and they could tell by the sound of it that he was excited and anxious. This time they could make out the words he said.

"The report that Richard had drowned was false? You say that he is alive? From whom did you get this information?"

"Rumor brought it at first," replied a voice that Millicent recognized as one of her uncle's men-at-arms, "but that rumor has been verified. He was shipwrecked, it is true, but instead of being drowned he escaped, only to fall into the hands of his enemies. The story goes that Blondel, Richard's favorite harpist, believing that he was still alive, went through the countryside singing the songs that Richard loved, and that one afternoon when he was singing outside a German castle a song that he and Richard had composed, the voice of an unseen singer joined his and sang the song to its close. He had found his king. As soon as he

reached England he went before the nobles with his story. Despite the anger of John and his probable hindrance, a movement to raise vast sums of ransom money is started."

Giles looked with glowing eyes toward Anselm, and the pressure of his hand on the man's arm strengthened. Anselm's face looked as if a light had been kindled within. Richard, their hero, was alive, not drowned. It seemed almost too good to believe.

There was an exclamation of rage inside the room and, from the sound, Giles thought that in springing up Lord Alford had knocked over a chair. There were hurried footsteps up and down the room. Then he spoke.

"Send Guilbert to me," he said curtly.

For several moments there was only the sound of steps, quick, hurried steps. That Alford was deeply troubled was evident. He had reason to be worried. His chances of holding the castle of Avalon were slight. Richard knew of his former disloyalties. The castle was by right the property of the Lady Millicent, and she was a ward of the king. On his return she would be given into the hands of another guardian, and he would be lucky to escape with his life. And yet, if the Lady Millicent were put out of the way he would be the one to inherit Avalon, and perhaps by offering the king money and fighting men he might gain

his support. At all events, Millicent must be removed from Avalon. He spoke his thought aloud, "I must rid myself of my niece."

Anselm and Giles looked at each other in the flickering torchlight. A look of complete understanding flashed between them. They had not expected to hear Lord Alford confess his dislike for his niece. They had not expected to learn his plans from his very mouth, but that he did dislike her and was making such plans held no surprise for either of them.

Millicent was bewildered. She did not love her uncle and knew that he did not love her, but that he was plotting against her came as a blow. At first she could not make sense out of what was being said, but when realization of the meaning of his words came to her, she was stunned. How could a little girl harm her uncle? Why should he wish to rid himself of her?

There were footsteps, the slam of a door, and the rattle of a sword.

"Guilbert," came the voice of Alford. "You would do much for gold?"

"Almost anything," was the reply.

"You would even kill a man or kidnap a child?" went on Lord Alford.

Now Guilbert had known Alford for a number of years, and he, too, had heard the rumor of Richard's captivity and probable release. He had

undertaken disagreeable tasks for Alford before, and well he knew the state of affairs.

"Do you want me to kill the child?" he asked suddenly.

"No," answered Alford. "Already the blood of her people lies at my door. I killed her father. Grief killed her mother, but it was I that caused that grief. I would have her unharmed. Let her be spirited away. If she is reported dead to Richard when he returns, I will swear my allegiance to him and keep Avalon."

"Would he not give it to you at all events if you promised him your services? He knows that she could be of no service to him. If you are in control here, it is probable that even if Richard returns he will not molest you."

"As long as Richard lives, John will not dare to come out openly and give me absolute control in my own right, but if she were out of the way it would be his duty to see that I received Avalon."

Out in the passage Millicent shivered. It was dreadful to have to stay there and listen to two big men discussing her fate and trying to make up their minds whether or not she should be killed. She was trembling so that Anselm put his strong arm about her.

"It will be an easy matter," continued Guilbert, easily. "There are plenty of wandering outlaws and Gypsies that might use such a child. Per-

chance they will sell her to others of their kind in a large city where she will be taught to beg for them. I could dispose of her easily. Let us plan."

"I have thought it all out," continued Alford. "To-morrow she will ride with me. On some pretext I will desert her at Rhywick Spring. Be there alone, for I would not have another soul learn of the transaction. We will start shortly after the first meal of the day. After I have deserted her, I will ride back to the riding party to spread the alarm that I was attacked by robbers, who fell upon me and stunned me. I will also tell them that when I came to myself the Lady Millicent was gone. Then there will be a great search."

"Yes," drawled the other. "But what if I am found with the Lady Millicent?"

"You must not be caught," snapped the other. "I will give you time to get away. Keep to the side of the hill toward Avalon. The search will be away from that direction."

By the scraping of chairs the listeners knew that they were rising.

"And the money I am to receive?" insinuated the deep voice of Guilbert.

"Bring me back the golden chain that hangs about my niece's neck, and the regular reward will be paid to you," answered Alford.

"I would have a part of it now," came the deep voice, this time with a hint of menace. "I will

deal fairly with you, but I would be equally sure that you will deal fairly with me."

"It shall be done," growled Alford and another moment the voices were dying away in the distance and again came the clang of the heavy hall door.

Millicent was crying softly to herself. There was a black frown upon Giles's face, and Anselm's lips were set in a narrow, firm line. He took hold of the little girl's arm and, in a firm but gentle way, drew her away from the panel. As soon as they were within the cell he spoke.

"To know of a danger is to be prepared to meet it," he said.

"You are going to help me?" asked Millicent looking up through her tears.

"Yes," replied both Giles and Anselm together. They discussed the matter at length. Millicent wanted to remain in the cell with Giles and Anselm. The thought of going back terrified her. "Do let me remain," she begged. "Surely they could never find me here."

Giles wished that he were a man, that he might challenge Lord Alford to fight for the possession. It seemed very hard that he should be only twelve years of age. The adventure that he had longed for so intensely that morning seemed to have arrived most unexpectedly.

Anselm was deep in thought as well. He turned over several plans in his mind.

"Please let me stay here," pleaded Millicent.

Anselm knew that that would never do. If Millicent were to disappear before the time he had planned, Lord Alford would know that his plan had been discovered and the whole countryside would be put on the search. He would know that some friend of the Lady Millicent had her in his possession, and would comb the forests and hills to regain her. Moreover, it would bring under Alford's suspicion every friend that Avalon was known to have.

It would be most unfortunate if he or Giles should be brought into prominence through the affair. He was deeply perplexed.

Giles, too, was deep in thought. How wonderful it would be if it were he who devised a scheme whereby the Lady Millicent of Avalon should be rescued from her enemies. What a glorious way to begin his career as a knight!

"If we could only get her away and let Alford think that everything had gone along as he planned, it would take all the suspicion away from us and it would keep Lord Alford from hunting around to see what had really happened," he said.

"You have it, Giles," exclaimed Anselm. "You have given me an idea. I know how we can foil him and, at the same time, make him think that all has been done according to his wishes."

"How?" cried both children at once.

"I cannot tell you the details," he replied. "I do not know just how things will work out, but Giles and I will go to Rhywick Spring to-morrow as well as you, Millicent."

"Must I go?" asked Millicent, her voice trembling slightly from dread.

"Yes, my child," he replied. "Go with your uncle. Agree to everything that he suggests. Act as though you delighted in his companionship. Let him lose you easily."

"I will do as you say," sighed Millicent. "I will go back now, for I must be there before the servants begin to prepare the room for the big feast. Nurse will not have missed me. You are sure that you, too, will be at Rhywick Spring?" she added catching hold of Anselm's long robe.

Anselm took the small hand in his big one. "You may trust us," he replied.

Again they went through the long passage and climbed the steep flight of stairs. Even the shadows cast by the flickering torch seemed menacing.

"This is your chance to prove that you have the courage of the Avalons," whispered Anselm. She stiffened proudly at the reminder. They heard no voices on the other side of the door so, after waiting a moment, Anselm allowed the girl to return.

In silence Anselm and Giles went back to the cell. The day which had begun so uneventfully

and so like other days, unmarked by special incident, had suddenly changed to a day of glamor and uncertainty. Giles felt that he had reached a turning-point in his life. Nothing could be just the same as it had been before, and, because he was young and a boy, he reveled in the approaching danger and looked forward to the morrow with keen anticipation instead of dread.

He would have been glad to sit up all night talking about what had happened and was likely to happen. He was so excited that he could not go back to his work. It seemed as if time crept by on leaden feet. Anselm was wise. He knew that the following day was sure to be a hard one. Even before the usual bedtime, Giles was sent to bed.

"A knight needs all his strength in the morning," Anselm said, in the face of the boy's protests. "Besides, time spent in sleep travels more swiftly than time spent awake."

But, although the boy did lie down on the hard little pallet that served as his bed, sleep did not come readily. Again he saw the Lady Millicent kneeling by his coat of arms with sympathy and understanding on her face. He saw her cowering against Anselm as she overheard the plot against her. His hands clenched themselves fiercely, and again he promised himself that he would give his life, if need be, to save her.

He wondered how Anselm would get her away

from the great burly Guilbert. He had seen the man knock down another man-at-arms at the tavern, and knew that he had a fist like a sledge-hammer. Anselm was strong, as Giles well knew, but what would mere strength do against the power of an ox like Guilbert? Besides, the man would be in armor, and Anselm had none.

Just at that moment there was the flicker of a torch and the grating of the secret panel. Anselm was going through the passage. Could he be about to go into the castle? It would be dangerous. In another moment the boy was at his side.

"Oh, please take me," he begged. "I cannot go to sleep. I have tried and tried."

For a moment Anselm looked doubtful. Then he nodded assent. Into the passage they stepped, Giles's heart beating so loudly that he began to fear that the noise it was making would awaken the inmates of the castle. As they were climbing the last flight of stairs, half-way from the bottom Anselm stopped and carefully ran his hand along the wooden paneling. There was a faint creak, and, to Giles's surprise, the very wall before them swung inward, revealing a dark hole. Anselm stepped into the hole, followed by the trembling Giles. Surely no boy had ever had so exciting a day before. His nerves were all a tingle with excitement. He started violently at the sight of a tall figure of rusty armor.

"It is only one of the empty coats of mail," breathed Anselm in the very ghost of a whisper, and Giles laughed silently at himself for being so easily startled.

Anselm did not stop to look around. It was very evident to Giles that he not only knew just what he wanted, but where to find it as well. Unhesitatingly he threaded his way between the warrior-like coats of mail and stacked spears and lances to the other side of the room. Giles followed, very much interested in all that he saw in the faint torchlight, looking not only from left to right, but before and behind as well. The hermit's torch sent faint, ghostly light that was reflected on the shining surfaces of shields and lances.

To a huge, hand-carved, brass-bound chest the hermit led the way. He handed the torch to the wondering boy beside him. From about his neck he drew a key which fitted into the lock of the chest. In another moment the chest was open before them. From it Anselm took a leather hauberk with rows and rows of small steel rings sewed to it in such a manner as to make them overlap. Beneath lay a knight's chausses, or stocking-like garments, also covered with small flat rings of iron. Giles knew that these small rings were to protect their wearer from lance and sword.

A jagged rent in the hauberk showed where a sword had torn its way through the garment, and

the dark-brown stain that stiffened the leather about the rent was, without doubt, blood. It was evident that the last wearer of the hauberk had been grievously wounded. Two swords were beneath the coat of mail. One was beautifully decorated as to hilt, with devices from the Avalon coat of arms. The other was plain as to hilt and blade, but was of finest workmanship. Anselm's dark eyes sparkled as he raised the latter, and his touch on the sword was like a caress.

Giving the sword into the hands of the boy, who still held the torch, Anselm took the hauberk and chausses and turned toward the door through which they had come. They had nearly reached it, when Anselm's long, trailing robe caught on one of the dozen spears stacked up about one of the pillars that supported the roof. With a crash and a clatter they fell upon the floor. There was the sound of voices, and the heavy tread of men's feet on the stone floor. Instantly Anselm extinguished his torch, took the startled boy by the arm, and hurried him through the doorway which, fortunately, was close at hand. As the first man-at-arms entered the now very dark armory, the hidden door swung back into place with the same defiant click.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT BEFELL AT RHYWICK SPRING

IT was very dark. Only the faint glow along the eastern horizon gave promise of the dawn. Anselm lit a torch at the banked fire and stood it in the sconce which had been made for it. The light shed by the torch fell upon the earnest face of the man as he knelt in prayer. He had done his best for both boy and girl. The future was in God's hands. He prayed that he might be able to save Millicent from the evil plan of her enemy and to help Giles too—ah, even in his prayers the future of the boy he loved looked dark.

He did not remain long in prayer. There was too much to do. Giles was still asleep. He did not see the man as he dressed himself in the leather hauberk and chausses of the knight. Over his knightly attire was the long brown robe of the hermit, and it was not until Anselm was ready to leave the cell that he aroused the boy.

It did not take Giles many moments to get ready to go. The big adventure had actually begun. Out into the early morning they started. The birds were just commencing to sing in the tree-tops, and to Giles the whole world looked very

beautiful in the faint gray dawn. As they descended the hill they looked often at another hill across the valley, to the other side of which they were going. There was a lovely pink tint in the east that gradually deepened into rose-color and gold.

It did not take them very long to reach the road at the bottom of the hill, for the path that led from the castle was a good one, but it was no part of Anselm's plan to keep to the path for long. Knowing a short cut over the opposite hill, he left the beaten way and struck off into the woods. As was natural, they talked as they went along, but both were careful to direct their conversation away from their quest.

"Matters which are private should never be talked of in the forest," said Anselm sagely. "It has been said, and truly, that the very walls have ears, but it could also be said that the forest has both ears and tongues."

"Let's talk about knights," proposed the boy. "Tell me some of the ways in which a boy is trained to enter knighthood. Suppose I were the son of some high noble of the land. How, then, would I learn the things a knight should know?"

"Until you were seven, you would remain at the castle with your lady mother. A boy under seven is trained only in one respect—quick, unquestioning obedience. At that age you would be sent

away from home. Perhaps your father would take you to some noble knight with whom he was friendly, or he might put you into the household of the king himself. You would be called a page. It would be your duty to wait upon the fine ladies of the castle, learn to sing, dance, and play upon the harp. You would learn to cherish and respect those weaker than yourself. You would accompany the ladies of the castle, when they went to ride or hunt with their falcons.

"At the end of seven years, you would become a squire. It is the duty of pages to spend much of their time with the ladies of the castle, learning what they have to teach. Some of their time is spent with the knights. A page even follows his lord into battle, but he, himself, is never in danger, for no knight would harm a page. The squire also goes into battle. He carries extra lances. Sometimes he bears the shield of his master. If the knight is wounded, it is the duty of the squire to carry him from the field of battle. If his horse is killed, the squire gives up his own horse to the knight."

Giles's eyes shone responsively. "You have taught me some of the things a page should know. You have taught me how to handle the lance and sword. I obey you as I would obey the lord of the castle, and I serve Avalon. If I could but ride a horse!"

Anselm smiled down upon him. "The time may come," he said simply. "You are strong and fearless. It would not take you long to learn."

The way became steeper and more difficult as they pressed forward. Their conversation nearly ceased, for it took most of their breath for climbing. By going over the top of the hill, they not only chose the way less followed by passers-by, but they also shortened the trip by two miles and over. It was wild, deserted country. Lord Alford had chosen well when he picked out Rhywick Spring for the dark deed. It would be a very easy matter for him to slip away into the bushes, leaving the child to fall into the unscrupulous hands of Guilbert.

There was no path. Over small stones and around big boulders they picked their way. The wild tangle of the vines and brambles caught at their clothing.

"This is good training," panted Giles at the end of the last steep rise. At the summit of the hill they stopped to rest. Below, the whole world seemed to lie asleep. The sun was up, but it had not yet burned away the mists which still rested upon the valley beneath them. The river was shrouded with mist that the sun had not yet burned away. They could see the road along which the hunting party would later ride.

"We will wait here until we see the party leav-

ing the castle," whispered Anselm, as if even the trees and stones were enemies.

Giles nodded, then threw himself at full length on the grass by Anselm's side.

"Tell me more about knights," he begged. "Ever since I have seen them I have longed to be one. They always protect those weaker than themselves and are courteous to women, aren't they?"

"Usually a knight chooses a high-born lady and vows to do some fine deed in her honor. To show her favor she gives him her glove or scarf, which tells to the world that he is her chosen knight. To her he pledges his allegiance."

"Just as I have done," replied Giles, highly gratified.

"It is fitting that you pledge your life to Lady Millicent and to Avalon, but the time may come when you will also pledge allegiance to another high-born lady."

"I thought a knight promised to protect every woman, even though she be only a poor old fagot-gatherer," replied Giles. Anselm nodded.

There was a crackling of bushes on the other side of the hill and the sound of heavy breathing. Then, loud and hoarse, came the sound of a voice cursing a certain log over which its owner had stumbled. Anselm drew Giles to a crouching position, well hidden by a huge boulder. Both of them had heard that voice before. It was the voice of

him who had agreed to steal the Lady Millicent for gold.

Anselm fingered the long sword that hung concealed under his hermit's robe. In his eyes was the light of battle. His hand was clenched so tightly over the boy's arm that it pained Giles, but he made no sound.

Evidently Guilbert had come to the hilltop for the same reason that had brought Anselm and Giles there. A wonderful view of the surrounding country was spread out before him. He also had wanted to see at what time the party would start from the castle. He sat down on a flat rock and looked intently in the direction from which Giles and Anselm had recently come.

In the opinion of the boy, Guilbert was a very ugly man. The mark of wickedness was impressed upon his features. His eyes held a shifty gleam in them that the boy instinctively hated.

"He wouldn't be trustworthy," he thought to himself, "but I do wish he were not so very large and strong-looking. He is much larger than Anselm, and he looks like a fighter."

Anselm was tall, but not very broad. Giles wondered if the two would come to blows. What chance had Anselm against him? The long robe of the hermit would be a sad hindrance in case of a fight.

Suddenly Guilbert leaned forward, an intent

gleam coming into his shifty eyes. Anselm and Giles looked in the same direction. Far below, between the two hills, wound the road along which a number of small specks could be seen moving rapidly. Giles did not need the quick pressure of Anselm's hand to know that there were Lord Alford and his friends, leading the Lady Millicent into captivity.

Guilbert smiled as he saw them coming. It was a smile so evil that Giles shivered. Then Guilbert rose leisurely, and turned toward the path up which he had recently climbed. Before he had gone a dozen paces, Anselm was on his feet and in the open.

"Hold!" rang out the clear voice of command, and Giles thrilled with pride and excitement. The man wheeled and faced Anselm. For a moment, he had the look of one who is afraid, but, seeing that the man who had challenged him was in the dress of a hermit and was a rather slightly built hermit at that, he shrugged his shoulders and again started down the path.

"Hold!" again came the call, this time more imperative. "I know where you are going, Guilbert. I know why you are going to Rhywick Spring, but before you leave this place your sword will cross with mine, and it will be the victor who goes to Rhywick."

With a snarl of rage, Guilbert turned to meet

his antagonist striding quickly across the open hill-top. Just before the man reached him, Anselm threw off the long robe, disclosing the mailed suit beneath. Guilbert stopped short. Recognition and fear sprang into his eyes.

"You, you!" cried Guilbert. "Are you ghost or man?"

Anselm smiled.

"I saw you dead," stammered the man hoarsely.

"You see me alive," replied Anselm. "Draw!"

Sword clashed against sword. It was evident to Giles, who had come out of hiding, that here was as pretty a piece of sword play as he had ever seen at the tavern. Anselm parried, stepped aside, and returned the attack as well as the best of them. It was plain that, although Guilbert was a fine swordsman, Anselm was holding his own.

Anselm well knew how to escape the mighty swings of his enemy's sword. He was as light upon his feet as his opponent was heavy. Guilbert was breathing hard. He was angry, and afraid of the man who seemed to have come back from death itself. What was Benedict doing here, disguised as a hermit? How had he recovered from that fatal blow struck more than a dozen years ago? With a mighty swing of the sword he pressed closer, only to be met by Anselm's ever ready sword. There was a quick twist of Anselm's wrist, which ended the fight. Guilbert's sword

flew from his hand, only to fall harmlessly at Giles's feet. The man gazed sullenly at the sword. He had lost and death would probably be the penalty, but he was no coward.

"Would you have me spare your life?" said Anselm softly.

The man stared at him boldly. "It is in your hands," he replied.

"Then let me bind you, for I would keep you my prisoner for a while," replied Anselm.

Guilbert raised no objections. He had lost. He was lucky to be escaping with his life, and he knew it. Anselm tore the long, brown robe into strips and bound his prisoner securely. Then, being a merciful man, with Giles's assistance, he moved the man to a shady spot.

By the time that this had been done, the horses and their riders had passed from view. Anselm called Giles aside.

"I do not want to leave him," he whispered. "He is a strong fellow and may try to escape. The loss of the gold that Alford has offered to pay is a hard blow to him. I will stay here. It is you who must go to Rhywick Spring and fetch the Lady Millicent to this place. The path up which this man came will lead you directly to the Spring."

Giles's eyes shone. He was perfectly delighted with his share of the adventure. Would it not

give him a chance to do a knightly deed? He could pretend that he was a real knight, riding to do brave and noble acts. As he crossed the open space at the top of the hill, the glint of the enemy's sword caught his eye.

He hesitated, picked it up, flourished it with a warlike gesture, and then set off to Rhywick Spring, the long sword dangling by his side. Guibert saw, and a black scowl passed over his face, followed by a look of crafty hate, but Giles neither knew nor cared.

Because he was happy, Giles sang a gay song of gallantry which he had learned at the tavern. It was a joyous, lilting air and he caroled it forth blithely until it occurred to him that a real knight would not advertise his coming in such a fashion. After that, he was silent.

The path was narrow and twisted. From the weeds that grew rank and undisturbed in the path itself, it was evident that few people were wont to pass that way. The side of the hill toward Rhywick Spring was much more gradual than that facing Avalon. Toward the summit of the hill there were no tall trees, only bushes and brambles. As Giles descended the hill, he came into a region of thicker underbrush and taller bushes. Then came the big trees of Rhywick Forest.

Giles knew that he had almost reached his desti-

nation, and that it behooved him to move cautiously. It would be some time before the riders would reach the Spring. Anselm had not told him what he must do. It was all in his hands. He must make his own plans. He tingled with the sense of responsibility. It would be well for him to explore the forest about the Spring and find himself a good hiding-place.

A short walk brought him to the Spring. Giles knelt by the clear, bubbling water and drank deeply. Then he began to examine this place to which he had come. Buried deep in the heart of the forest, it was a favorable place for the doing of evil deeds. Lord Alford had chosen well.

"Yes," thought Giles, as he looked about him. "It is a good place for you, Lord Alford, but it is a good place for me as well."

After a very careful examination, Giles decided that, as he did not know from which direction Lord Alford would come, it would be well for him to take refuge in a tree. An excellent one stood beside the Spring. With some difficulty, for the sword was an ungainly thing with which to climb, Giles ascended the tree and stowed himself away, far enough up to be well hidden by green leaves.

It was a long wait. The boy arranged himself as comfortably as possible in his leafy retreat, and amused himself by scratching his new coat of arms

upon the bark of the tree with the end of the sword. It was not a very successful attempt, because the sword was long and awkward to handle.

Above him was the soft blue sky with little wisps of white clouds afloat upon it. The sun was shining gloriously, bathing the top of the tree in molten gold. The foliage about him was so thick that it shut out the sunlight from below, where it was dark and gloomy. It was very quiet. Only the sighing of the wind in the tree-tops and the singing of birds was to be heard. It was pleasant just to be alive on such a day.

At his left towered the hill upon which Anselm was waiting. Beyond that hill was the valley that separated it from the hill upon which the castle of Avalon was built. The story of the building of that castle and of the events which followed its building were favorite tales, upon which Anselm regaled him on winter evenings. The castle was built before the conquest of England by the Norman William. The tops of both hills had been considered as possible sites for the castle. It was decided that its present site was better, being higher and more easily fortified.

When the Norman William had invaded the country, bent on making himself conqueror, Avalon had been one of the last castles to yield homage. As long as the young lord of the castle had been alive the castle had held out against the foe, but at

his death the power had been broken. His twin sister had been unable to hold out against the persistence of the enemy.

As was his way, William at once gave the lands and castle to one of his own men, a young noble who had served him gallantly during his stay in England. This young man had fallen in love with the sad Lady of Avalon. As he had thrown himself heart and mind into the fray against a stubborn England, so did he press his suit with characteristic vigor and gallantry in his siege upon her heart. As he had won before, so did he win again, and the lovely Lady Evelyn became his bride.

This made the Lady Millicent the descendant of two noble families, in many ways antagonistic to each other, but brought by love to peace. Millicent spoke both English and the French of the Normans. Although many years had passed since the Conquest, still England was torn by prejudice and the hatred of the Normans and English.

It was all very puzzling. Giles then thought of the events which had recently come up. It was much safer, he thought, to be a simple peasant with no one to plot against one, than to be a lord of a castle with many enemies. Then he thought of the burned villages of the English peasants, and the huge amounts of produce collected from them every year, and decided, more rightly than he realized, that it wasn't very safe to be alive.

Suddenly, there was the sound of little bells. At first it was very faint but, moment by moment, it grew louder. Then, from the forest, came two horses ridden by a man and a child.

CHAPTER V

A FEAST AT AVALON

THERE had been no one in the great hall when Millicent returned from the hermit's cell. No one had seen her push aside the tapestry. She had not been missed. Since Lord Alford had sent away all the old servants, there were none to care whether she were present or absent, happy or sad. She would not see her uncle until the five o'clock supper. Even then he might not notice her, for there was to be a big banquet and merriment would run high.

The banquet was to be in honor of the fine ladies and gentlemen whom Uncle Alford had brought to the castle. It probably would be a very fine affair, for Uncle Alford had given orders that no pains were to be spared to make it successful. The chief cook had been racking his brains for days, to think up new dainties. Millicent decided to remain in the great hall, in order that she might watch the preparations.

Although it was mid-afternoon, the room was very dark. People were very sparing of window space in those days. The narrower the window, the harder it would be for an enemy's arrow to do much damage within, and besides, in castles where

the rooms were large and very hard to heat, the more necessary it was to shut out the cold. Millicent carried her embroidery frame to the lightest spot she could find, and sat down before it.

She had started that piece of tapestry when she was a little girl. Those first stitches did seem so big and wobbly beside her later work. It was fun to weave the bright-colored woolen strands into patterns. To-day, however, her mind was not upon her work. She was wondering what would happen the next day. Where would she be at the close of it? She was still thinking of this when the first servant entered the hall. From then on, there was much coming and going.

The standards that held up the long boards, which served as tables, were brought from their places, and the boards were laid across them. Several tables were set up, for many people were expected to the banquet. Over these rude tables, which were as fine as any in the land, long, white linen table covers, which reached to the very floor, were spread. Setting the table in the days of King Richard was a simple enough matter. There were no cups for tea or coffee, for neither had ever been brought to England. Instead, people drank a mixture of wine sweetened with honey and flavored with spices,—clove or cinnamon. This was served in big silver goblets which were passed from one knight to another.

There were no forks. The churchmen of the day considered those that had been brought into the country as sinful luxury, and forbade their use. Meat was served in huge pieces. When one wanted meat he cut for himself a portion from the big piece, took it into his hands, and proceeded to eat it. Of course the gravy smeared his hands. Sometimes he wiped his hands upon his clothing, after licking off the gravy as best he could, but usually a page, carrying a towel and a basin of water, went about the table between courses in order that the knights might wash their hands.

To us, such a manner of eating would seem very disgusting, but Millicent was used to it, and would not have known what to do with a fork were one given to her. When goblets and knives were placed upon the table it was set until the meal began. Then huge trenchers with smoking-hot meats and other dainties were brought in and placed before the assembled company. Knights and ladies were served in order of their importance.

As it was to be a very splendid feast, Millicent went early to her room to prepare for it. She needed the help of one of the fine ladies. Dressing was a serious business in the days when gowns buttoned up the back with dozens and dozens of buttons. Millicent's gown was blue and gold. It had two kinds of sleeves. One pair was very snug,

and fitted closely about her wrists. She had another pair of flowing, winged sleeves. The neck of the dress was low. A knotted girdle was about her waist. She looked very pretty and very frightened as she entered the big hall, for she was not used to parties. Until her uncle had come to Avalon, she had lived most simply.

She dreaded meeting him. She knew that she would be thinking of the dreadful thing that he meant to do with her, and was afraid that, just by looking at her, he could tell she knew his plan. She dreaded the feast but, most of all, she dreaded the coming of the next day.

It is true that her new friends had promised to help her. She wondered what they could do. "It is my castle, too," she thought resentfully. "Oh, I do wish that my father had lived, or that I had a big brother to take care of me. Then he would not dare to make such a plan. I come from Avalon, though, and I must be as brave as a boy. I must not let him know that I realize what he is going to do. I must pretend to love him." With that resolution in her mind, she joined the gay company and soon was talking about tournaments and jousts with the best of them.

Several times she met her uncle's eye and flashed across a gay smile to him. Pages brought in torches and set them up in their sconces. At last all of the guests were assembled, and took their

places on long benches that were drawn up to the table. The torchlight brightened the gay scene, for although it was only afternoon and the sun was still high in the heavens, it was needed in a room where the only outside light sifted through narrow slit-like windows.

It was a gay feast, ordered by one who was a lover of luxury. The great haunches of meat were very good, and so were appetites. Laughter and fun ran high, especially after the spiced wine had made its rounds. In bewildering variety, meats continued to appear. Venison or deer-meat from the Avalon preserves came first. Then came a haunch of bear-meat. As a side-dish there were great trenchers of fowl from the castle flock. These were served in rich gravies. As there were no spoons, the gravy was sopped up on pieces of bread.

At the close of each course, pages carried about water and towels in order that the guests might wash the sticky gravy from their fingers. More and more meats were brought in, for it was at a time when meat was the chief staple of diet.

Between the courses jugglers tossed several objects into the air, catching, tossing, and catching again, but never dropping them, although there might be half a dozen objects in the air at once.

It was about the third course when the principal dainty was set before Lord Alford. A little ex-

clamation of admiration rippled through the room, as it was brought in from the kitchen.

"It looks alive," whispered Millicent softly to the lady beside her. Truly it was a work of art. No peacock of all the flock looked more natural. Its iridescent feathers glistened in the light of the torches. Its tail was spread in a graceful sweep. Who would have supposed that it had been carefully skinned, cooked, and arranged inside a carefully prepared covering by the cook? About this covering the glittering feathers were arranged in as lifelike a manner as possible. Cooks were artists in their lines in those days.

Finally there came a pause in the eating. Minstrels brought in their harps and charmed the guests with their sweetest love songs and most stirring ballads of bravery. The minstrels were followed by story-tellers, who thrilled their listeners with tales of knighthood. "How Giles would love to hear these stories!" thought Millicent. "I will try to remember them so I may tell him later."

Then came more eating, this time rabbit and pigeon-pie. Millicent was a very tired little girl when the feast finally came to a close. She fell asleep almost as soon as her head touched the pillow, too tired to think of the danger of the morrow, but Lord Alford lay awake a long time thinking of the fine feasts he would have when he was Lord Alford, master of Avalon.

Early the next morning came the clear call of the watchman's horn, bringing its message that the sun was up and all about the castle was well. "Early to bed and early to rise," seemed to be the rule of the Middle Ages, for hardly had the last notes died away before the castle was astir. The last thing that Millicent had thought of the night before had been the danger of the following day, and almost as soon as she opened her eyes she remembered.

The ride which had been planned the day before was the talk of the morning. It was regarded in the light of a contest. Two parties were to ride from the castle in opposite directions. A certain place on the farther side of the hill opposite Avalon was to be the meeting-place. Both companies were to start at the same time. The side reaching the meeting-place first would be the winner.

In the enthusiasm of the race it would be easy for Alford to get left behind with Millicent. He had decided to pretend faintness as they neared the road that led into Rhywick Forest. He could easily send the others on before, keeping Millicent with him. At the Spring he would desert her and then, after giving Guilbert plenty of time to make away with her, would return to his guests, make up some wild tale about being attacked by outlaws, and start them off on a wild-goose chase to rescue the stolen Millicent. It was not such a bad

plan, and would have worked like a charm if forewarned had not been forearmed.

"Come, little niece," he cried genially as the whole party rode across the drawbridge out of the courtyard. "Let us get better acquainted during this ride. I have hardly seen you since I returned to Avalon. Will you not be my little lady and ride with me to-day?"

"Gladly, my uncle," replied Millicent, fighting to keep the tremble out of her voice. "You are more than kind to honor me."

The color rose in her cheeks. She was embarrassed and felt that the whole company of riders was looking at her. Her uncle laughed down upon her.

"It is a pity to waste that bright blush upon an old uncle," he said gallantly. "A few years from now all the gay knights will be fighting over your smiles."

More color flew into the little girl's cheeks. He was talking of ten years from that time, while in his heart he was planning that her career as a fine lady of England should end that very day. He was untrustworthy. He said one thing and thought another. Although her heart was full of anger, scorn, and fear, she found herself to be a gallant dissembler. She smiled upon him archly.

"Avalon will indeed be a gay place then, my uncle," she laughed. "From all over the land

brave knights will ride to win my hand, but I shall smile sweetly upon them and shall say that I very much prefer the society of my kind uncle, who gives fine feasts for me and has minstrels and story-tellers to amuse me."

"She thinks that I did it all for her," thought Alford, much amused at the simple little compliment. "It will be an easy matter to hoodwink her."

"May heaven forgive me for that black lie," thought Millicent piously.

Down the steep hill to the valley below they rode. The horses went very slowly, picking their way carefully at every step. The little bells on the bridles rang sweetly. As soon as they reached the bottom of the hill they separated, half of the company turning to the left, the other half to the right. The road was level now. The horses shook their heads impatiently, as eager as their riders to be off. At a given signal both sides started racing toward the distant goal.

For some moments they rode fast. Then the leader pulled in his horse. It would never do to tire them all out at the very start of the race. Side by side, along the road that led to captivity, Millicent rode with her uncle. He was very devoted, according her the courtesy he would have shown a grown woman. He told her pretty stories as they rode along. Had not Millicent known what was in her uncle's mind she would have enjoyed

the ride greatly, for Uncle Alford could be very fascinating when he chose.

"There is said to be a magic spring hidden deeply away in Rhywick Forest," he told her.

"A magic spring," she echoed. "How lovely! What magic properties is it supposed to possess?"

"It is said," he began, lowering his voice to a whisper, "that any maiden who bathes in its waters will instantly become as beautiful and as charming as the fairest lady in the land, and she who drinks deeply of its cool refreshing waters will receive fortune and true love."

"Oh," cried out Millicent. "How I should love to bathe my face in its waters and drink deeply as well."

"Perhaps it could be managed, little niece," replied Lord Alford, smiling to himself to think how very easily she was falling into his snare.

"Do you know where it is?" she asked eagerly.

"I will guide you there myself," he answered obligingly. "It is said that the enchanter Merlin himself, in the days of King Arthur, laid the spell upon these waters. I will send these other riders on before, so our side may have some chance of being first to the meeting-place. You and I will venture into the enchanted forest alone."

"How kind you are," said Millicent gratefully.

Shouting a command to the rest of the party to continue on without him, Lord Alford took a little

side path which led into Rhywick Forest. Millicent's heart beat faster as they neared the fatal spring. She wondered whether Anselm and Giles would really be able to rescue her.

When they reached the spring Alford drew his horse to a halt and dismounted. He raised his arms to lift the little girl down.

"Drink deeply, little niece," he exclaimed, as she knelt down beside the clear, bubbling spring.

She did not see what happened next. A sharp exclamation from her uncle and the sound of horses' feet made her look up quickly. Her horse was running away.

"I'll get him," shouted her uncle, hastily mounting his own horse. "Wait here for me. I will catch him for you."

In another moment Millicent was alone by the spring—alone in Rhywick Forest.

CHAPTER VI

THE FLIGHT

FOR a moment the little girl stood looking after her uncle. She had expected to be deserted, and yet it was a shock. The woods were very still. Did Guilbert lurk somewhere beneath its gloomy shade? Had Anselm really meant to come to her aid? There was no sound except the rustling branches. The fright that she had valiantly hidden all morning rushed over her and tears crowded from her eyes. She listened intently for the sound of footsteps, but in vain.

Giles, safely hidden away from all observation from below, watched Lord Alford as he rode away. From his point of vantage he saw the man catch up to Millicent's horse, seize his bridle, and lead him away. As soon as he felt very sure that Lord Alford would not return, he slipped from his branch and, by clinging and sliding, descended the tree.

At the first sound from above Millicent looked up with a startled little cry of alarm. When she saw that it was Giles a smile broke through the tears.

"Oh, I am so glad that it is you," she cried joyfully. "Where is Anselm?"

Giles laughed. "I left him on the hillside keeping watch over the fine, burly villain that was going to kidnap you. You ought to have seen them fighting. It was a pretty sight. Such mighty slashes! And you should have seen the black look he cast upon Anselm when, with a quick turn of his wrist, Anselm sent his sword flying."

Millicent shivered. "I am glad that I was not there to see," she said, "though, of course, it was very fine of Anselm, and I appreciate it more than I can ever say. I did not know that Anselm could fight. I thought hermits never fought."

"Well, he can," replied Giles, looking around apprehensively. "Come quickly, for soon the whole countryside will be looking for you."

The boy led the way up the crooked little path that twisted and turned among the trees. Giles went ahead warily. It would be terrible if he failed to get Millicent to Anselm in safety.

"I thought that all hermits did was to read and write and care for the wounded and sick," continued Millicent. "I did not know that they could fight."

"I believe that Anselm can do all the things that knights can do," replied the boy, turning to look at her. "He can handle the sword and the lance. He has given me lessons in courtesy. He has ridden a horse, although I have never seen him do it. He has even ridden in a tournament."

The path grew steeper as they ascended. It was more rocky, and crowded with weeds and brambles. Millicent was well out of breath before they were half-way there. The wind blew her hair about her face. Her dress was torn in ribbons, as she hurried through the wild tangles of berry vines. Dresses, even riding-dresses of that time, were very long and not in the least suitable for cross-country scrambles. On all sides it touched the ground. Millicent tripped constantly over its long folds.

"I wish I had a drink of that beautifying water now," she panted. "Are we most there?"

Giles looked at her regretfully. "It is a long way to the castle but it is not so far up the hill. What do you mean about the beautifying water?"

Millicent laughed and, between gasps for breath, told him about the enchanter Merlin and the spell he had laid upon the water of that particular Spring. "I think it was just an excuse for getting me there without my making a fuss about leaving the other riders," she finished up wisely.

"I think so, too," agreed Giles. "Anselm says that a good many of those old stories of enchanters and spells are just fairy tales and many people really believe them."

After that both children were silent, keeping their breath for the climb. Millicent was badly scratched. Several times she tripped over her long skirts and fell headlong, but she choked back the

tears and tried to keep up with the more easily-moving Giles. He turned to help her over the steepest places and so, after more than half an hour of upward scramble, they reached the place where Anselm was waiting.

They found Anselm serenely gazing off at the castle of Avalon, apparently oblivious of the black looks his companion was casting at him. A rustle of the bushes made him turn toward the children with a smile. Things were working as he had hoped they would. There was still danger. It would be hard to return to the cell unobserved. The whole country would be aroused within a few hours. He must plan his return carefully.

"You were going to be paid well for this deed, were you not?" he asked, turning to his prisoner. Guilbert looked blacker than ever. "Duke Alford would pay you a high ransom for returning his niece safely to him," went on Anselm, purposely pretending to misunderstand the motive for the abduction. "Do you know of the torture given to one who tries to kidnap a person of high standing if he fails? Do you know of the hot iron, the pinchers, and the boiling oil?"

Guilbert looked at him with a sneer.

"I know more than you think I do, Benedict," he replied. "I know that you and Lord Alford are enemies. I know that you will do nothing to help him. Let me take the child. I will make

him pay dearly for her return and you, you will share in the reward."

"And what if there is no reward?" said Anselm. His voice was soft but there was a deadly note in it. "What if it is Lord Alford's plan to rid himself of the little lady and he hired you to do it for him?"

The color left the man's face for suddenly he remembered something that he had forgotten. It suddenly swept over him who Benedict was. Several stories that he had heard and forgotten a dozen years before came crowding back into his mind.

"I know the whole plan," said Anselm softly. The conversation had been carried on so quietly that neither child had heard a single word. "I know what Lord Alford said to you. I know it all. You were to get money for selling the Lady Millicent to outlaws. Am I right?"

Guilbert nodded sullenly.

"However, I want to hear it from your own lips. It will be for your own good to tell me the whole story," continued Anselm.

"I will tell you upon one condition."

"And that?"

"That you will allow me to leave here unharmed."

"Agreed."

"I was to sell her to outlaws and, as a sign that

I had fulfilled my part of the bargain, I was to bring back to the castle her golden necklace. Upon receiving it from my hands Lord Alford was to pay me for my services."

During this last conversation Giles had drawn nearer.

"Where were you going to hide after you had captured her?" asked Giles.

"I shall not tell you," replied Guilbert sourly.

Anselm walked over to where Millicent was standing.

"I must ask you to give up your necklace," he told her. "It will be a sacrifice to save yourself."

Without waiting to question him, the little girl lifted the chain from her neck and laid it in his outstretched hand. Anselm hung it on a thorn-bush in front of Guilbert. That individual looked on in amazement.

"It is a fancy of mine that Alford should think that his plan worked as he hoped it would," said Anselm. "I am going to take the Lady Millicent with me, but I will leave her chain here on this thorn-bush. You are not tied securely. In an hour or so you will have worked yourself loose. Then you will be free to leave this place unharmed. You still may get the money that Alford offered you. Take the chain to him. Tell him that you have rid yourself and him of the Lady Millicent."

"Do you mean," broke in Guilbert, "that you want me to get this money? I cannot believe it."

"Believe it or not, as you please," replied Anselm. "I am going now, but I will leave the chain. You may use it or not, as you choose, but you need fear nothing from me. I will not return Lady Millicent to her uncle. You can trust me not to call his attention to myself. He hates me, as you know well. Come, children."

He paused only long enough to tie a strip from his torn robe over Guilbert's eyes so he might not see in which direction they went.

"I do not trust him," he explained to Giles. "He hates me for wresting his sword away. There is nothing that he would like better than to first obtain the gold that was promised him and then to betray me into the hands of Alford."

He led the way down the steepest side of the hill, the side toward Avalon.

"The closer we get to the castle, the safer we will be, for they would never expect kidnappers to bring her back close to her old home," panted Giles.

The way was steep and rocky. In places they had to cling closely to bushes and saplings to save themselves from tumbling. Millicent's skirt hung about her in ribbons. Her hair held a collection of leaves, twigs, and snarls. A long scratch defaced one cheek.

"My best friend or my worst enemy would hardly know me now," she thought. "I must look like a poor little ragged, beggar child."

At last they came to a steep ledge about eight feet from top to bottom. Anselm swung himself over without hesitation, landing safely at the bottom. They had gone over the worst part of the way. From there on it slanted more gradually. Anselm reached up his arms and lifted Millicent down. Giles, scorning assistance, swung himself over as he had seen Anselm do.

The ledge shelved out, thus making a sort of shelter. Through the trees and bushes they could see the opposite hill, crowned by the towered castle of Avalon. The road leading up to the castle was also in plain sight.

"Here we rest till the night falls," said Anselm, laying down his sword. Giles looked at it a bit regretfully. He had laid Guilbert's by his side when he found out that he was going to carry out Anselm's wishes. Millicent drew a long breath of relief. She was very glad that they were going to rest. Between the excitement of the feast the night before, the ride of the morning, and the wild scramble over the rocky hillside, she was just about exhausted. In a very few minutes she was fast asleep, her dirty, little face pillowled on a badly scratched arm.

Giles was not tired. He was used to long climbs,

and the adventure of the morning was quite to his liking. He sat hugging his knees with his chin resting upon them, looking off toward the castle.

"What are we going to do with her?" asked Anselm, nodding at the sleeping Millicent.

"Do with her? Do with her?" repeated the amazed boy. It seemed a strange question to ask of a boy. If Anselm, wise as he was, did not feel able to plan wisely, how could he expect it of Giles?

"We couldn't keep her with us, could we?" questioned the boy after a few moments of thought. "We could hide her from Alford, but there isn't much we could do toward getting her castle away from her uncle. He has driven out every one of the old servants and filled the place with men that are loyal to himself."

"She has no chance of getting her castle back for some time, for Alford is a friend of John and, given half a chance, John will put him over Avalon. If Lady Millicent were again to fall into Alford's hands, in all probability he would have her killed. In any case John would rule that she was only a child, and a girl child at that, totally unfitted to train warriors for his service, too weak to rule over the men-at-arms of Avalon, and, therefore, the rule should go to a man who could."

"Oh, if Avalon belonged to a real, strong man, the kind of a man who would love and protect the

Lady Millicent!" cried the boy enthusiastically. There was a curious smile on the man's lips which the boy did not see.

"You have not told me what I shall do with her," reminded Anselm. "I want your advice on the matter." It made Giles feel very grown-up to be consulted. He lay back on the grass, his heels in the air, thinking deeply.

"I am glad I am not a girl," he remarked. "A boy must learn how to ride and fight and do all sorts of interesting things, but all a girl is allowed to do is to stay in the castle when there is any real fighting, and learn how to sew and make tapestry. Tapestry,—the very word makes my head ache."

"They learn how to ride and hunt with the falcon in times of peace," replied Anselm. "They must learn how to bind up the wounds of those who are hurt in battle. The world would be a sorry place were it not for its women. We could not get along without them."

"I know that," agreed the boy. "What I meant is that I'd much rather be a boy. I suppose Millicent ought to learn all of those things, too. Boys are sent away to be pages in some other castle. How do girls learn all the things they are supposed to know?"

"Usually they are taught at home by their mothers. Sometimes they are sent away to the castles of friends of their parents. The lady of the

castle teaches them to embroider, sew, dance, play games, and care for the wounded."

A sudden light came into Giles's eyes. He sat up as quickly as if he had been jerked up.

"Are there not many knights who are friendly to Richard and refuse to accept John for their king?" he exclaimed. "It would be a good plan to take Lady Millicent to one of them secretly, and ask that she be taken in and taught by the fine ladies of the castle. She could remain there until she grew up. Then, when Richard came riding home from war, you could go before him and tell him the tale. He would take the castle away from Lord Alford and give it back to its rightful owner, the Lady Millicent. Perhaps he would make you her guardian."

"It is a good plan," replied Anselm. "It shall be done."

Late in the afternoon Millicent awoke. All three ate heartily of the black bread and cheese that Anselm had brought with him, and drank from his jar of water.

"I never ate this kind of bread before," commented Millicent, crunching it between strong white teeth, "but I think that I never tasted any that was nicer. Please give me some more."

"It is excitement that gives appetites," said Giles sagely. "There are no such appetites as knights have."

"You should have seen them eat," laughed Millicent. "There was a big feast at the castle last night. All the fine friends of my uncle were there. On the tables were great trenchers of fine meats, cooked to a turn and swimming in rich gravies. I wish you could have smelled all the goodies. The trenchers were filled to the very brim. Then you should have seen the attack that was made. The men went for the meat with both hands and, long before the pages carried around water and linen towels, they were smeared with gravy up to their eyes."

"I should like to go to a feast like that," said Giles wistfully. "Just to hear you tell about it makes me hungry."

Several times they saw horsemen ride to the castle, and away. Their feverish speed told Anselm that word had been brought to the castle that Millicent had been stolen by outlaws.

"The whole of Avalon and all the surrounding towns are out to look for you probably," said Anselm. "We will have to return very cautiously. It will be quite a risky journey from here to the cell for it will be necessary to cross the road twice."

"There will not be many out after nightfall," commented Giles. "Many believe that the glen is haunted by spirits of the dead and are afraid to go that way. If we return by the glen, we shall be safe."

"What about the spirits of the dead?" asked Millicent doubtfully.

"Anselm says there are none," replied Giles. "I have been in the glen at night. I didn't see or hear anything which made me afraid."

"How surprised my uncle would be if he knew that I was hiding almost under his wicked nose," laughed Millicent. "Do you know," she went on more seriously, "this is the very first adventure I have ever had."

"May all your adventures end as safely," said Giles gallantly. "It was a lucky thing that you decided to explore the hidden passage."

At last the long afternoon passed away. The sun set, a fiery ball of red in the western sky. For some time its rose-colored glory lingered. The castle stood in dark relief against the light beyond. Then dusky shadows gathered about the base of the hills. The light faded slowly from the sky. As twilight deepened into night, the three fugitives began the descent. The way grew easier under foot, but more dangerous as they neared the road.

As they crouched behind some bushes by the roadside Giles's quick ears caught the slight jingle of bells. Motionless the three sat, like statues, listening as the rider drew nearer. It was a knight who rode up out of the shadows. The moonlight glimmered on his coat of mail. He had been searching for the Lady Millicent the whole after-

noon but he rode past, little dreaming that she lay concealed by tall grass and bushes within earshot of his jangling armor.

As soon as he was out of sight, like startled rabbits, they scurried across the road into the friendly shadow of the wood beyond. They were in the haunted glen. Millicent, indeed, held her breath for she had heard wild, senseless tales of headless witches and lean, lank goblins who haunted those dark covers, and at every whisper of the night her heart beat faster. Were it not for the fact that both Anselm and Giles held her hands in a close, reassuring clasp, she would have shrieked out in terror.

"Isn't this fun?" whispered Giles in her ear. He had often roamed the woods, both by day and by night. It had been part of Anselm's training in helping him to master fear.

"F-f-f-fun," quavered the Lady Millicent. "I guess so," she added doubtfully.

"We'll have to go out into the road," said Anselm after some time had elapsed. "I'll go ahead and you follow with the little lady. If you hear my voice, slip into the underbrush and keep very quiet."

There was no breath of wind stirring. Everything was very silent. Only the moon lighted the hillside. It cast fantastic shadows. Giles was trembling with excitement as they drew near the

great rock which hid the way to Anselm's cell. It was upon that rock that Giles had climbed the day before to see the gay cavalcade pass. It was here that he had wished for excitement and the chance to do valiant deeds. Perhaps it was a wishing rock after all. He determined to make another wish when he reached its summit.

It was a difficult matter to get Millicent over the rock. It was too dark for her to see the notches which were cut in the rock. Her long dress made climbing hard. Finally they solved the problem. Giles lay flat on his stomach, his toes digging into the rock as hard as he could. He stretched his hands as far as possible toward Millicent. Anselm lifted her toward the boy. Their hands just met. Giles leaned a little closer. His strong hands closed upon her wrists. There was a push from below and a pull from above and she was at his side.

Anselm joined them immediately. The descent was much easier, and soon they were at the waterfall that hid the mouth of the cell. Suddenly, from the darkness ran a woman wrapped in a long coat. She fell upon her knees at Anselm's feet.

CHAPTER VII

NANNY

"THEY have done away with my little lady," she cried out. "I feared that there was some such scheme when I was dismissed from the castle and to-day I know. I know Lord Alford! I knew him as a mean, cruel young man years ago. I knew that my young lady, the Lady Millicent's mother, feared him. All the village thinks that fierce robbers fell upon them as they rode through the forest. Lord Alford returned to the other riders, blood-stained and dusty. He said that he had been beaten with cudgels until he was unconscious, and that when he came to his senses Millicent was gone."

"What a lie!" commented Giles as he came up with Millicent.

"Oh, Nanny! Nanny!" cried Millicent, throwing herself upon her old nurse and holding her as if she never meant to let her go. "How badly I have missed you!"

With a gasp of relief the nurse's arms closed about her, and both cried a little from the excitement of the day and the joy at finding one another. Then Millicent had to tell Nanny all that had happened since she had left the castle. She told

how she had found Giles and Anselm, and how kind they had been to her.

"Where have you been, Nanny?" she asked.

"At the tavern," replied the nurse with a meaning glance at Anselm. "My sister is wife to the landlord and she does not begrudge me a place to sleep and food to eat. It is a good place. I can see and hear many things which it may be well you knew."

"Lord Alford, I will never call him my uncle again, hates me," said Millicent reflectively. "He wished to rid himself of me."

"The black villain," cried Nanny hugging Millicent closely. "I'd like to see him in the hands of black-hearted, murdering outlaws, that I would. It would give him a taste of his own medicine. Heaven's blessing rest upon you, Anselm. Well have you kept the promise that you made twelve years ago to my Lady of Avalon."

She then seemed to remember Giles and, putting a thin hand upon his arm, turned him about, that the light of the moon might fall upon his face. In her long, flowing, black cloak she looked very witch-like. Her face was in the shadow, but Giles felt that she could see into his very soul, her look was so intent. He seemed to sense a tenderness for even him, a stranger. For some moments she stood regarding him. Then she turned to Anselm.

"You have done well with the boy, my friend.

He is as straight as a lance, and he looks strong and hearty."

"He is straight in soul and mind as well," replied Anselm.

"Little did I think when I held him in my arms, a tiny baby, that some day I should see him under such conditions, in this place, living this sort of life."

Giles pressed forward. He had often longed to know more about his home before he came to Anselm. Perhaps Nanny could tell him something. He was a baby when he had been brought to Anselm. His earliest recollections had been of playing in the grass before the cell. Perhaps she had known him before he had come to Anselm. Perhaps she could tell him about his mother and father whom he could not remember.

"Did you know me when I was a baby?" he asked eagerly.

"That I did," she replied heartily. "Was it not I who brought you to Anselm in a market-basket, all covered over with a fine linen towel?"

"Perhaps you can tell me who my parents were," he said. "Where did you get me?"

"Oh, off a gooseberry-bush, or perchance it was a currant one," she replied lightly. Then she added more seriously, "Bide your time, lad. Some day you will know a great deal more than you do to-day." With that very evident statement

she turned the conversation to the need of making plans for Millicent's future.

"I have decided to send her to her Uncle Sibert," replied Anselm rather slowly. "It is not safe for her here until Richard is ransomed and again rules over England. It is best that she go to her uncle."

"Uncle!" exclaimed Millicent in wonder. "Why, I did not know I had another uncle!"

"You intend to take her there?" asked Nanny in a wondering tone of voice. "You will take her there, in spite of the hard feeling that exists between the two families?"

"Sibert is a just man. It is true he was angry when his sister married the Lord of Avalon, but he will not deny her daughter protection from danger. The Lady Constance, his wife, loved your mother dearly," he said, turning to Millicent. "She will love you in memory of her."

"I don't believe I like uncles much," she confessed, slipping her hand into Anselm's. "I would much rather stay here in the forest with you and Giles. You could keep me to care for the cell and be your chatelaine."

"What does that word mean?" asked Giles.

"The chatelaine is mistress of a castle," replied Anselm, "but, my child, a hermit's cell needs no chatelaine. You must be taken to the castle of some high-born lady who will teach you all that a fine

lady of the land must know. Lady Constance will be good to you. Having loved your mother, she will surely welcome you. She will teach you how to make fine tapestry, to dance, play games, and to ride. She will teach you to tend to the wounded. Then, when Richard comes back to his kingdom, you will be ready to take your place as mistress of a castle."

Millicent looked doubtful. The thought of going out among strangers, who neither knew nor cared for her, made her shiver with dread. Her quiet life at the castle of Avalon, under the care of sober Roderick, had made her timid, and she dreaded the thought of going into the bustle and excitement that hung about most castles of the time. Then, too, her recent experience with her uncle was not one that would make her care for the society of another.

"She must hide here until the hue and cry over her disappearance dies down," went on Nanny thoughtfully. "Then, by disguise and traveling in secret, the change may be made."

"We must first find out Alford's plans, in order to act intelligently," said Anselm.

Millicent shivered again. She wondered how Anselm would manage the matter, for usually those who traveled went upon horseback or in a coach escorted by a strong, armed guard. It was not safe to ride unattended, for in the forests and

along lonely roads bad men gathered, men who lived by stealing from passers-by. Some of these ruffians took only the purses of their victims, while others robbed them of their very clothes.

Travel was a matter of strict necessity rather than pleasure. Young knights, who were eager to show that they were men of valor, often rode out for adventure and rarely did they fail to find it waiting for them. They rode forth in their bright, new armor, anxious to do some brave deed in honor of some fair lady, but women and girls seldom went upon a journey.

Considering all this, it was not strange that Lady Millicent dreaded a long journey, especially one to be made in secret without the armed guard for protection. The whole country would be stirred up over the loss of their little Lady of Avalon. A huge reward had been offered for her recovery. It would be no easy matter to elude their vigilance.

"I don't want to go," she said slowly.

"I only wish that I had your chance," commented Giles.

"I must leave presently," said Nanny, "but before I go I would see my little lady in bed."

Anselm led her to the cell.

"It is here that she will sleep," he said. "Giles and I will take our blankets out under the stars as we have often done before."

In spite of the fact that after her long, exciting

day Millicent was very tired, she did not want her old nurse to leave her. Night with only a curtain of falling water between one and the great, outside world was a terrifying experience.

"Sing to me, Nanny!" she pleaded, clinging closely to her nurse's long cape and drawing her down beside her. Very softly, the very whisper of a song, came the old, old lullaby which so often in happier days had soothed her to sleep. It was not a long song, but before she had sung it through twice Millicent was asleep.

Giles was tired, but he knew that it would be discourteous for him to let Nanny go off unattended.

"I will walk part of the way with you," he said, as she came from the cell.

"No, Giles," replied Anselm. "I intend to go with her myself, for there is much that I wish to tell her. Keep guard until I return."

Lying under the stars, Giles looked up into the deep, blue blackness of the night, thinking over the events of the day. Two days before, adventure had seemed a long way off. Now he was in the midst of it. Life had seemed very dull and prosaic before. Now it was crowded with danger, mystery, and excitement.

He thought of what the nurse had said of him. She had brought him to Anselm in a market-basket. It seemed strange that he should be car-

ried in a market-basket. Why had she not carried him in her arms as babies were usually carried? He had been covered with a linen towel. Had it been to conceal him? Why should he have been concealed in a market-basket, with a linen towel to hide him from view? From where had she brought him? Why had she brought him to Anselm? Who were his parents? They must be dead. It was most perplexing.

Think as hard as he could he was unable to make head or tail of the matter. It grew later, and he was very tired. A soldier left on guard would not fall asleep. A knight keeping a lonely vigil would stay wide awake. Anselm must have much to say to old Nanny. They were probably making plans for the future. What part would he have in those plans? How differently from usual Anselm had behaved the last few days! How the steel blades had clashed that morning! Giles wished that he could make a sword obey his will as Anselm had made his. Again a wave of sleepiness swept over him.

"I must not go to sleep," he thought drowsily.

Meanwhile, in the shadow of the great rock that separated the two paths, Anselm and Nanny were holding earnest conversation.

"She will have to travel as a peasant child," said Anselm. "Can you get her the proper clothing? Her whole appearance must be altered."

"My niece's oldest child is a little larger than the Lady Millicent," replied Nanny. "Only last week she put away some of her outgrown clothing for little Lisbeth."

"It is necessary that not even your niece should know that you are looking for clothing for a little girl," warned Anselm. "Lord Alford may suspect you of having something to do with the child's disappearance. You will have to be very careful in all you do and say."

"I can take the clothing secretly, and later make it right with my niece," replied Nanny. "I will bring it to you here."

"It will not be safe for you to come here," answered Anselm. "We must run no risks. There is a hollow tree near the road, opposite this rock. Conceal the garments there, and Giles or I will fetch them."

"You are right," replied Nanny. "We must do nothing that will bring suspicion upon us. The whole neighborhood would think that we had captured her to hold for ransom. A false move on our parts would cost us our lives. Lord Alford will make a big stir to get her back into his possession."

Anselm paced restlessly up and down.

"How are the villagers?" he asked, after a moment's thought. "Is Lord Alford well liked among them?"

"He has given them extra measures of barley and is much more lenient than Roderick was. They really think that he was devoted to his little niece. They will rejoice when he is put into power."

Had there been a stronger light Anselm's face would have shown to her his anger.

"Fools!" he exclaimed. "They are fools blinded to their own best interests. Once he is put in control he will show his true nature. He will force them to spend more of their time upon the grounds and gardens of the castle, and less upon their own. He will require large taxes of their produce to be paid yearly, and will punish them with the lash if they fail to carry out his unreasonable commands. They are blind."

For some time they talked over the plans for the future. Then Nanny brought the conversation around to Giles.

"What are you going to do with the lad?" she asked. "Surely it would be good for him to get out in the world, and mingle with men and boys whom it would be well for him to know."

"He will go with Millicent and myself to Lady Constance," he replied.

"It is a sorry tangle," said Nanny as she started off down the hill.

After a while Anselm returned to the half-asleep Giles, who lifted his head warily at the sound of his step.

"It is all right, lad," he said. "Go to sleep!"

Giles needed no second invitation. Within five minutes he was wandering in a mist of dreams of knights, ladies, and fire-breathing dragons, but the man beside him lay a long time awake, thinking deeply.

CHAPTER VIII

A GOLDEN CHAIN

AFTER so much excitement it would not have been surprising if they all overslept the next morning. Millicent, unaroused by the customary horn, did sleep late, but Giles and Anselm were used to awaking early, without the aid of a horn, and were about at the usual time.

During their simple meal it was decided that Anselm should go to the village to learn what he could of Lord Alford's future plans, and to hear as much as possible about the search that the villagers were planning.

"I may offer my services in helping the good work along," he told Giles.

The boy's eyes twinkled at that idea.

"If I were you," he replied, "I should search most diligently. I should search on the opposite side of Rhywick Hill. Let me join the search. I know a lovely thicket of thorn-apple and some splendid thick and snarled-up blackberry-vines warranted to tear fine clothing to shreds. It would be a great pleasure to lead Lord Alford in a search through them."

Anselm's lips smiled, but his eyes were grave.

The situation was a perplexing one. They had by no means reached a solution of the problem.

"It will be a long, hard day for me," he replied. "I shall be away until evening. I do not expect that any one will stumble on this place, but we must be careful, very careful."

"Some one ought to be constantly on guard," said Giles. "That will be my task. I will keep a close watch on both the road leading from the castle and upon the valley road. If they do come to this place, I will hide her."

"Where?" asked Anselm.

"In the passage that leads to the castle," replied the boy quickly, and Anselm went away well satisfied with his plan.

Time dragged slowly after the man's departure. Giles wished that Millicent would hurry and wake up. He wandered about the ledge, keeping carefully concealed from any real or imaginary foe. He pretended a certain old stump was the enemy and practised creeping up upon it as quietly as he could to escape detection. It was rather fun to play that he was advancing upon the foe, but it would have been much more fun if Millicent were there to play with him.

Already he was thinking of her as a simple friend with whom he could talk and play, rather than the high-born Lady of Avalon. At last, when it seemed as if he just couldn't wait another mo-

ment and simply must wake her up, she came out of the cell. She had bathed her face and hands with the water that flowed like a curtain over the mouth of the cell, and had emerged sweet and clean from her coating of dust. Except for the scratches on face and arms and the wild tangle of hair, she looked much as she did the first time that Giles had seen her.

Giles set out a simple breakfast of dark-colored bread, cheese, and milk, and, because he had a healthy boy's appetite and desired to be sociable, he ate with her. As soon as the remnants of the repast were put away, Giles led the way to a secluded nook from which they could watch the road with no chance of being observed. There they could talk softly, with no fear of being overheard.

They both found plenty to tell each other. Millicent told Giles about the life at the castle, about Blanche, her dear horse, and about Cæsar, the falcon.

"He is so beautiful," she exclaimed. "His feathers are so soft and brown! I hope they will be good to him. He is like an arrow sped from a bow."

Giles had seen something of falconry from a distance, but he was keenly interested in finding out just how the thing was properly done. Falcons were birds of prey which were trained to ride upon

the outstretched wrist of master or mistress. On their heads they wore little embroidered hoods to blindfold them. As soon as the owner saw a bird which he desired to capture he unhooded his falcon, tossed it into the air, and watched as it mounted higher and higher. As soon as the bird of prey caught sight of its victim, it poised for a moment, took a careful aim, and then as straight as an arrow made for it.

She also told him of the huge hall in the castle, where her uncle and the knights who were his friends gathered for feasting and merriment. She told him some of the exciting stories which she had heard the knights tell. They were tales of gallantry and brave deeds. It seemed as if he would never tire of listening.

Time goes fast when one is interested and is having a good time. Several hours passed without anything exciting happening. It is true that several groups of knights rode away from the castle and others rode to it, but they did not seem to be searching the hillside. Both children, like shy little woodland creatures, kept careful vigil. At last Giles rose to his feet hastily.

“Look!” he whispered, pointing to the road winding about the base of the hill.

A single horseman was coming toward the castle. It was quite a way from ledge to valley road but Millicent was almost positive she knew who was

drawing nearer each moment. She had seen that burly form before.

"I am going to a place I know, which is nearer to the road," said Giles softly. "You stay here. I want to make sure who it is."

Millicent nodded, shrinking closer to the ground lest she be seen.

Giles sped to Overlook Rock. A warped and twisted oak-tree grew near by. The boy swung himself up into its branches. He climbed until he was well-hidden by foliage. Soon he heard the jingle of little bells which grew louder and louder. At last the rider drew near enough so Giles could see him plainly. As he had thought, it was Guibert riding up to the castle to bring Lord Alford the golden chain of the Lady Millicent.

CHAPTER IX

PLANS AWRY

UNTIL he had passed above the curve in the road, Giles lay motionless. It was true that Guilbert had the necklace in his possession and that he would try to get the promised reward. It was also true that he hated Anselm for humiliating him, and would relish a chance to get him into trouble if he could do so safely. His eyes had followed Anselm venomously when he had been bound to a tree. It would be very unlikely that he would in any way reveal the fact that he had not done as had been planned with the Lady Millicent, but what was there to hinder his dropping some hint to the effect that Benedict, enemy to Alford, was alive?

He returned to the place where he had left Millicent. His face was very grave and thoughtful.

"What is it?" she asked, apprehensively noticing the trouble in his face.

"It was Guilbert," said the boy gloomily. "He has gone up to the castle to get his reward." The little girl looked up at him in perplexity.

"But that is just what Anselm wanted," she pointed out.

"I know," replied the boy, "but I don't trust him. He is harboring revenge upon Anselm. I feel sure of it. He hates him for taking away his sword. There is nothing that angers a fighting man as does wresting away his sword. He would like to revenge himself, even although the fight was a fair one. He might accuse him of some evil deed."

Millicent shivered at the recollection of the grim, sinister-faced man who had scowled upon her so blackly on the hillside. She was quite capable of accusing him of any evil deed on the strength of that look.

"I wish that Anselm were here," continued Giles. "If we could only hear what they say. Then we could know what to expect."

Millicent scrambled to her feet and laid an eager hand upon his arm. Her eyes had a very intelligent gleam. She clapped her hands softly.

"I know just what we can do," she proposed excitedly. "We can hide in the secret passage, slip the door in back of the tapestry out just the littlest way, and listen to every word they have to say. It might help us to make plans of what to do."

Giles looked at her soberly.

"You have got a good head for a girl," he conceded. "Let's go now."

For several moments they fumbled about, trying to discover the hidden spring on the paneling in

the cell. Neither Giles nor Millicent had seen just where it was when Anselm had opened the panel. However, by pressing carefully on all the places near where they thought it was located, they at last succeeded in pushing it aside.

"It's lucky that we didn't have to retreat into the passage in a hurry," said Giles soberly. "It was thoughtless of me not to make sure before Anselm left."

Giles fetched a new torch and thrust one end of it deep into the glowing embers of the banked fire. Fires were usually kept from one meal to the next, in days of long ago. It was hard to get one started and, because wood was cheaply obtained, the fire was kept from meal to meal and from day to day. This was done by banking. When it was needed for cooking the covering was carefully raked aside and fresh fuel added. As soon as one end of the torch was ablaze, the children slipped into the secret passage, closing the panel behind them.

All talking ceased as they entered the passage. It did not take long to reach the other end. The panel slipped a little to the side without the slightest sound to betray them. There was a confused murmur of voices on the other side of the tapestry. Evidently the noon meal was in full swing. The laughter of ladies and the deeper voices of the men mingled in a blur of sound. Once or twice they heard the deeper voice of Lord

Alford, and Giles thought that he could distinguish the voice of Guilbert.

For some time they listened to the medley of voices. Both children were tired, long before the meal drew to its close. Millicent leaned her head back against the side of the passage. It was all that she could do to keep awake. At last they heard the rustle of people, the rising and scraping of benches as they were shoved back from the table, and gradually the voices of knights and ladies died away.

Then came the curt voice of Lord Alford, ordering the servants to hasten in clearing away the remnants of the feast. They could hear the scrape of benches being dragged away to their places against the wall, and the thump of table-boards as they were lifted from their standards and lined up against the wall.

Again came the voice of Lord Alford, curt and impatient, ordering the servants to make haste. This was followed by the slam of a heavy door. As soon as the last servant left the room, Lord Alford turned toward Guilbert.

“Well?” there was brusque command mingled with anxiety in his voice.

“It is done,” replied Guilbert airily.

“You mean?” he inquired.

“Yes,” answered Guilbert.

“Well, what do you mean?” questioned Alford.

And both of the children could hear the strain of worry and even fear in his voice. How surprised he would have been if he knew that they were so close to him that they could hear every word that was said!

"I mean that I have come for my reward," replied Guilbert.

Lord Alford drew a long sigh of relief. He had come for his reward. Then everything had happened as he had planned.

"You have the proof?" he queried.

"Here," replied Guilbert. "I have come for my gold."

Alford broke into a great laugh of relief. "There is naught to stand between me and the inheritance," he exulted. "Tell me more of the details! Was she hard to manage? Relieve my uncle-like anxiety, I beg of you."

Both men laughed boisterously at this pleasantry, and Giles felt Millicent stiffen rigidly beside him. Uncle-like anxiety, indeed!

"It was an easy matter," lied the man glibly. "She gave a startled scream when I laid hold of her, but I stuffed a gag in her mouth, threw a blanket around her thus pinioning her arms at her side, bound her securely, and, after throwing her across the saddle, rode away with her as easily as if she had been a bag of meal."

Giles and Millicent exchanged glances. There

was a twinkle of amusement in Giles's eyes, and he wondered what would happen if he suddenly opened the panel and confronted Guilbert with the word "Liar!" He could almost see the amazed and terrified face of the man he would be accusing. Millicent shivered. The picture which he presented might have been a real one and was not in the least attractive to her.

"Tell me more!" demanded Alford eagerly. "What did you do with her?"

"Well," continued Guilbert, "I rode a little farther to a lonely part of the forest where I had heard that Gypsies and outlaws often made their stand. And it was into their hands that I gave the Lady Millicent."

Lord Alford looked at him keenly. He had been regretting that he had offered Guilbert so large a sum. Perhaps it would be possible to make him satisfied with less or perhaps, by trickery, he could escape paying the whole of the reward. It would be worth trying.

"Gypsies or outlaws," he said. "They are different. To which did you give her?"

"As I was riding along I met a band of the strolling ones who live from hand to mouth on what they can steal. They did not speak either Norman or English so it was to them that I gave the child."

"Not to outlaws?" said Alford slowly.

"No," retorted the other. "The other way was much the better. Gypsies cannot understand the words of those who are seeking the little lost lady. They would not understand her if she promised to give them rich rewards for returning her to her castle. She cannot tell them who she is. Why, man, I could not have done a better thing."

Lord Alford said nothing for several moments.

"I thought the plan would suit you well," continued Guilbert.

The plan did suit him well. He was very much pleased. He did not care whether Millicent were in the hands of Gypsies or outlaws, so long as she never turned up to wrest from him the castle of Avalon, but he did see a way to cheat Guilbert out of a part of the promised reward. He pretended great anger. The logic of Guilbert's reasoning was unanswerable, but he chose to ignore it.

"You have broken our agreement," he said slowly, yet sternly.

"In what way?" snapped the other.

"It was agreed that the child should be given into the keeping of outlaws, and you have done otherwise. I shall allow you to keep that gold which I have already given you, but no more shall you receive."

"Is that so?" asked Guilbert softly. His voice was quiet but there was distinctly an unpleasant note in it.

"Yes," said Alford firmly, although there was something about the other's voice that was not quite pleasing to him. "You shall forfeit the reward."

Guilbert had already received a large sum for doing the deed. This had been paid to him when the plan was made. He had received the money and had failed to do the deed. That money was like an unearned gift. He ought to be satisfied. Moreover, he knew what kind of a man Alford was and, although he himself was tricky and untrustworthy, he hated Alford for having those same unpleasant traits. Here was his chance for revenging himself, both on Lord Alford for his attempted trick and upon Benedict, his old enemy. The idea appealed to his sense of humor.

"Lord Alford," he said slowly, "if I give up all my claim upon this reward peaceably and without fighting for my right, will you swear an oath by all of the saints and by the city of our blessed Lord that you will permit me to ride away from your castle and away from Avalon, unmolested and free to join my friends in the forest?"

Alford looked at him suspiciously. This mild agreement, this calm giving up of all hope of reward, was most unexpected. However, he was greatly relieved.

"Will you promise," he asked, "will you promise that you will not divulge to another what I

have told you of my hopes and plans? Will you swear by the Veronica handkerchief that our blessed Lord used when He wiped the blood away from His face, that you will never aid my niece against me? If you are willing to swear this, then by all the bones of all the saints in heaven and by the Holy City as well, I swear that thou shall depart in peace, be your record ever so black. May my right hand wither and blast by my side if I break my oath."

"By the Veronica handkerchief that has wiped away the stain of blood from the face of our Lord, I swear that never by deed or word will I betray that which I know concerning the dealings of Alford, Duke of Avalon, toward his niece, Millicent, former owner of Avalon, and I will depart in peace without claiming the reward which was promised to me and which is, by right, mine."

Lord Alford heaved a great sigh of relief. So loud a sigh it was that the children could plainly hear it through the tapestry. It looked very much as if things were going very smoothly for Lord Alford. He was assured that Millicent would never trouble him again, and he had so managed it that his accomplice had agreed to go away with only a part of the reward promised to him. Everything looked rosy to Lord Alford.

Giles and Millicent could hear the clank of sword and armor as Guilbert crossed the floor to

the door but, before he reached it, he paused and said blandly, "To show you that I bear you no ill will I will give you a bit of information that cannot help but interest and benefit you."

"Well?" asked the other.

"Do you recall Sir Benedict, younger brother of my lady, the Lady Millicent's mother?"

Lord Alford's lips suddenly parched. It had been Sir Benedict who had betrayed to King Richard the treachery of Lord Alford at the time of Millicent's birth. It had been Benedict who had kept him from gaining possession of the castle at that time.

"It was I who killed him," said Alford, and his voice trembled. "You saw him dead."

"It must have been his ghost that I saw on top of Rhywick Hill no later than yesterday," laughed Guilbert. "It was a pretty substantial ghost, however."

"What do you mean?"

"Mean?" repeated Guilbert. "I mean that no later than yesterday I saw and fought with Sir Benedict."

"I left him breathing his last on the road that leads up to the old Monastery," almost whispered Alford. "You can't have seen him. I tell you the man is dead. It was some other man you saw."

"You know my reputation as a swordsman," answered Guilbert. "You remember that thirteen

years ago he wrested my sword from me with a clever twist of the wrist. No man before or since has been able to do that until yesterday. Yesterday, I met him and we fought. Again my sword was twisted from my grasp. Who, but Benedict, ever carried a plain-hilted sword with its insignia scratched upon its blade?"

"That sword is in the armory," put in Alford.
"You are lying to me, as you have lied before."

Guilbert laughed unpleasantly. "Send to your armory and tell them to bring in the plain-hilted sword. You will find it missing."

Lord Alford started for the door but paused.

"You said that you fought with him," he said.
"What was the occasion of that fight?"

Guilbert hesitated. He did not want to confess that he had lied about the Gypsies, but he did want Alford to know in whose hands he would find the Lady Millicent. At last he spoke, his very good imagination standing him in good stead.

"He saw me at the Spring and followed me. As he went on foot and I on horseback, I soon distanced him. Then I fell in with the Gypsies and handed over to them the Lady Millicent. On my return I again met him and this time recognized him. We fought and he wrested from me my sword, and forced me to tell what I had done with little Millicent, his niece. I refused at first, but he was so pressing with his sword that I decided

it better to humor him. Later I saw her in his possession. He saw you desert her. He knows that you are planning to take her castle."

"You lie," stammered Alford.

"Let the missing sword prove my words are true," said Guilbert. "She is in his hands now."

Alford flinched. He knew that Guilbert was capable of lying, but he also knew that he would not be able to think up such a tale himself. There must be some truth in it. He was in a state of collapse. Sir Benedict was the only soul on earth whom he had ever feared. It was he who had prevented his evil deeds from succeeding. He hated him as he hated no other man. He had rejoiced as he stood by his bleeding body a dozen years before. How had he recovered? Had the monks from the monastery found him in time to save his life? Where had he been these last twelve years?

While he was still in that dazed mood, Guilbert quietly withdrew. He had done enough and it was safer to be elsewhere. Alford would probably blame him when he had thought the matter over. Guilbert was satisfied. He had gotten considerable reward although he had failed in his mission. He had succeeded in frightening Lord Alford badly, and had in some measure gotten even with Anselm for tying him to a tree.

Bubbling over with a desire to talk things over, and rightly judging that they would learn no more

from Lord Alford, Giles and Millicent hurried through the secret passage to the cell.

"What did he mean?" broke from both pairs of lips, as the panel slid back into place.

"He told a lie about giving you into the hands of Gypsies," said Giles. "He told a dozen lies. How do we know he was talking about Sir Benedict? Anselm says that one can never believe one who is known to be false."

"He had a good reason for telling the other lie," replied Millicent sagely, "but what he said about Benedict sounded like truth. You know that he mentioned a plain-hilted sword, and you told me yourself how Anselm got that sword. Besides, Anselm knows about the secret passages of the castle. I don't think that Guilbert could think all that out for himself, either."

They went out on the green turf before the mouth of the cell where, far below, they could see the winding road. For several moments they sat in silence. Both were thinking over what they had heard and were trying to make it fit in with what they already knew. It was Millicent who spoke first.

"Do you remember telling me that Anselm could do all the things that a knight could do, and that you told me that he had ridden in a tournament?"

"Yes," replied Giles wonderingly.

"Only knights may ride in tournaments," said Millicent simply.

"Guilbert said that he was your mother's brother," said Giles suddenly. "Why, that would make him your uncle, Millicent."

"My uncle," said Millicent softly. "Why, so it would. He is much more like what a good uncle should be than Uncle Alford."

Several times during the day the children saw villagers and knights go up to the castle, but each time they passed by the dividing rock. It seemed strange to Giles to have Anselm away for so long and he worried about him, but he was not lonely. Neither he nor Millicent had ever known the friendship of children of their own age, and both enjoyed the experience.

Giles showed her his pets. There were a pair of snowy rabbits with six little ones in a snug, little hutch. Millicent went into raptures over the pretty things. Sitting down by the hutch, she spread out her dress to receive the soft baby morsels that Giles handed to her. Giles brought her handfuls of clover blossoms which she fed to them, one by one. He also showed her how to lift them by the ears.

"I should think it would hurt them," she objected. "What makes their noses wiggle so?"

Giles could not answer that question, but he had a theory to offer concerning their long ears.

"I think they were made that way for handles," he told her.

When they were hungry they ate the dark bread and fruit that Anselm had left for them. At last the setting sun spread a rosy glow over the sky, but still Anselm did not come. Giles was frankly worried.

"I wonder whether I ought to go and try to find him," he said, after a long silence. "I am afraid that he has met Guilbert or some one whom Guilbert may have turned against him."

The trouble in his face was mirrored in Millicent's eyes.

"I wonder if he is really my uncle," she mused. "I hope so, for it would be nice to know that I belonged to some one who really cared for me because I belonged to him. When Uncle Alford first came to the castle I was so happy, for I thought that he would love me and that I should love him."

"I haven't even an uncle," replied Giles, "but I have always felt as if I belonged to Anselm. He has always been so good to me."

The evening shadows deepened. Both Giles and Millicent were tired, yet neither thought of going to bed. A single star shone out over a pine-tree. It made Giles think of the star on his coat of arms. He turned to mention it to Millicent, but he did not speak for she was sound asleep,

leaning up against the sprawling root of a tree. The night wind swept over the hillside and, although it was early summer, there was a chill in the air. Giles brought out his thick cape and laid it over her shoulders.

It had been rather a wonderful day for him. He envied the boys and girls who had big brothers and sisters. He found himself wishing that he had a sister like Millicent who would be interested in his doings. Had he been a real page, she could not have treated him with more respect. It made him feel very grown-up to have her put into his care.

Hugging his knees in his favorite attitude, he looked out over the moon-flooded valley, and something in his heart gave a great throb of delight at the beauty of the night. It made him long to go out into the world and do something fine and wonderful.

“To right the wrong and follow the king,” the words sang themselves over and over in the boy’s heart. A sound of footsteps on the path drew him out of his world of dreams. They were familiar footsteps, and the boy sprang to his feet in delight. In another moment the man’s arm was about the boy’s shoulders.

“Were you worried, Giles?” asked Anselm.

“Yes,” returned Giles. “I was not afraid for myself nor for Millicent, but I have discovered

that you have an enemy that you little suspect and that there is new danger for you."

Anselm laughed easily. "I know that Guilbert recognized me on the hilltop. Our swords have crossed before. He holds a grudge against me. I did hope that the chance of getting a reward would keep him silent, though well I know that he is venomous. Tell me how you come to know anything of my enemy!"

The boy told of seeing him on the way to the castle. He told of Millicent's plan of overhearing what was said. He repeated the conversation they had heard almost verbatim. Anselm approved of everything that had been done.

"It gives me something to go by," he said. "Now that I know what they know, I can better foil them."

"Are you really the Lady Millicent's uncle?" asked Giles. "Are you Sir Benedict, disguised as a hermit?"

"I really am," replied Anselm.

"What happened to-day at the village? Were the people angry that their little lady had been taken away? Was the chase exciting? Did you take part in it?" How many other questions would have followed in quick succession, I do not know. Anselm laughed heartily. It was not a loud laugh, but it awoke Millicent in time to hear his adventures.

"As I was ambling along the road this morning as if never a care in the wide world bothered me, who should come riding along but a young squire from the castle? He stopped to tell me of the desperate ruffians who had snatched the Lady Millicent away from under her uncle's nose. I expressed deep concern. I agreed to aid in the search that was being made. Together we came to the town market-place. On all tongues was the story of the disappearance of the Lady Millicent. Men and boys were planning to comb the hills to find her at all costs. I told them that I well knew the region around the Spring, that I had often hunted through the fields and woods for herbs. I offered to help in the search. I offered to lead a party of searchers. My offer was accepted. All about the Spring we searched, beating down brambles and thickets. We were scratched and torn by thorns. Some quit but many searched the whole day, anxious for the reward that Alford had offered."

"The reward?" said Millicent in bewilderment. "Why should he offer a reward for me? I thought that he wanted to get rid of me."

"Yes," replied Giles wisely. "He wants to get rid of you but he does not want people to know that he wants to. He wants people to think he is half-wild at losing you."

"It was on the farther side of Rhywick Hill

that we searched," continued Anselm, "and in the swamp at its base. It was there we found reason to think that she had been carried that way. We found bits of her gown which had been torn from it by brambles."

Both children looked at him in amazement.

"How could that be?" asked Giles. Anselm laughed.

"They were placed there by me," he responded. "It proved to them that she had been carried that way."

The hermit took a package from under his arm and handed it to Millicent.

"Here are your peasant clothes, my child, little niece," he added affectionately. "Dress yourself in them to-morrow, and we will then make our plans. Good night, my children."

CHAPTER X

THE FLIGHT FROM THE CELL

FOR several days Millicent lived at the hermit's cell. The sun tanned her face. Life was very different from that which she had lived at the castle. For the first time she ran and played with another child. For the first time she played out on the open hillside.

She grew very much interested in the housekeeping arrangements at the cell and insisted upon taking over the cooking of the meals and the tidying of the cell. Giles was not sorry to have her undertake this particular part of his work, for he detested anything concerned with housekeeping. At first everything seemed much coarser than that to which she was accustomed, but the novelty of it fascinated her. It was true that the bread was dark and hard, but a healthy outdoor appetite made it taste better than the finest loaves ever baked by the castle cook. The little dress that Nanny had sent was only rough homespun flax, dyed with herbs from a country garden, but it was simply made, in a style more comfortable than any that she had worn before, and she liked the color of it, a rich medium blue.

The second day she was at the cell marked a

great change in her appearance. From a golden haired, fair-faced lassie she became dark of hair and of complexion.

Anselm knew much of the value and use of herbs. He had many sweet-smelling ones stored away in his cell. Some were hanging in great fragrant bunches from the rafters that held up the roof of the cell. Others were steeped in water which was contained in earthenware jars. In one of these jars was a clear, brown liquid that Anselm said was made from the bark of nut trees. It was what he had used from time to time to keep his own naturally light hair dark.

It was in this liquid that Millicent dipped her long, golden curls. They came out dark, wet rings. Anselm then diluted some of the liquid, which she used in staining her face, neck, and arms.

When the curls had been rubbed dry and arranged in peasant style and the dress and rough, footwear of the peasant were assumed, Millicent looked like another child. Lady Millicent of the castle of Avalon was gone, and simple little Ann of the country remained in her place.

There was much going on at the castle and about the countryside. When Lord Alford discovered that Millicent was with her other uncle, his worst enemy, he was much alarmed. He knew that Sir Benedict would not rest until he had returned his

niece to her rightful position as Lady of Avalon. He wondered how Sir Benedict had discovered the plot. Could it be simply by chance? Alford was inclined to believe that black magic was at the bottom of it. One thing was very certain. It was now absolutely necessary to regain the possession of the Lady Millicent.

Before, he had determined to rid himself of her. Now, he would have cheerfully given one-fourth of all his ill-gotten gain to have her back. He doubled his original reward. Every day knights rode out of the castle and passed the rock of division, but so careful were Anselm, Giles, and Millicent that the secret of the hidden cell remained secure. Perched as it was on a ledge over one precipice and under the overhanging of another one, the place was well-nigh inaccessible.

Both Giles and Anselm took great precaution in leaving and returning to the retreat. Only under the cover of darkness did either climb the intervening rock. Twice Nanny came to the cell to bring news of what was going on in the village. Once she came by moonlight, the other time long before sunrise.

Both times she brought food, for the supply was getting low. From her Anselm heard that every one had learned that Sir Benedict was suspected, but since none of them knew what he looked like, several men had been sent for who would recog-

nize him. After that Anselm did not go to the village. Neither did he let himself be seen about the hill. He instructed Nanny to inform any who asked about Anselm, the hermit, that he had been contemplating visiting the shrine of Thomas à Becket.

"I have been thinking of making the pilgrimage for some time," he told the children. "Let the curious think I have gone."

The whole countryside was in a fever of excitement.

"I thought it would subside if I waited long enough," said Anselm gloomily, "but every day it grows worse."

That night Nanny made her third visit to the cell. She was breathless from the climb and wild with excitement. For a few moments she could not speak. Giles filled one of the crockery dishes from the spring and gave it to her. She drank deeply.

"What is it?" asked Anselm, when she had regained her breath and was able to speak.

"They are going to search this hillside to-morrow morning," she said. "They know now that Anselm the hermit and Sir Benedict the English knight are one and the same."

For a moment no one spoke. It was too much of a shock.

"How do they know?" asked Giles.

"I will tell you," replied Nanny. "As you know, my sister's husband keeps the tavern and it is there that I have been staying since I left the castle. This evening a group of soldiers came in for the nightly mug of beer. One of them was an evil-looking fellow whom I had not seen for twelve years, but I recognized him. Once seeing him, one would know him again. They called for their beer and they called for a room in which they could discuss private matters. My sister showed them into a little room off by itself. I had made up my mind that I would listen to all of their private matters myself, and, knowing of a spot that was thinner than all the rest and away from where I might be seen, I laid my ear against it. By the sound of footsteps I knew that some one went to all the doors and windows to see whether any one was about.

"'I have a secret which I would sell for gold,' I heard one man say.

"Another laughed and replied, 'There are many who are willing to sell their secrets for gold.'

"'Mine would recover the Lady Millicent,' replied the first speaker.

"'Why, then, do you not take advantage of your own secret,' gibed a voice which I had not heard before. There was a shout of rough laughter, and I could hear anger creep into the voice of the first speaker.

"‘Take it or leave it,’ he snapped. ‘It is well worth the money I ask. I know of others that will be glad of the information.’

“Then came the low-pitched voice that seemed to belong to an older man.

“‘Do not leave in haste. Will you tell us why you are willing to sell this information, rather than use it yourself?’

“‘I cannot use it,’ replied the first, mollified by the courteous request. ‘Lord Alford is my enemy, as I am his, for he did not keep his promise to me. I would not help him now, were it not for the fact that by doing so I can revenge myself upon another enemy and earn no small sum for my pains. In my hands now lies the knowledge which will recover the Lady Millicent. For an equal share of the reward, I will tell it to you.’

“Then came a confused murmur of voices. I could not tell exactly what was said. Then again I heard the deep voice of the older man.

“‘We agree,’ he said.

“‘The man you seek is Sir Benedict.’ He paused dramatically.

“‘You are crazy,’ snapped the second one. ‘You are crazy, or else you are trying to make sport of us. My brother saw Sir Benedict lying in a pool of his own blood. The man is dead.’

“‘No, Rick,’ replied the older man. ‘I have heard rumors that such might be the case. My

information came from one of the men-at-arms.
Your news is old. I heard that yesterday.'

"Did you never think it strange that so young and strong a man as Anselm should be a hermit? How often have you seen him face to face? He rarely comes to town. Do any of you know where upon the hill he makes his home? I have made inquiries about him. He came, as far as I can find out, about the same time that the Lady Evelyn, Millicent's mother, died. Does it not seem strange to you that no one knows anything about him? Who is he? I think I know. Last week we fought, he and I. He cast aside his hermit's robe. He was in armor. I recognized him by his swordsmanship. I recognized him by his plain-hilted sword. Put yourself on the trail of the hermit Anselm and you will win the reward."

As Nanny stopped, out of breath, there was a stunned silence. Millicent's eyes were opened very wide. They held horror. Giles looked at Anselm. The man's face was as set as if cut from granite. Giles broke the silence.

"I know that it was a wishing rock," he said positively. "I wished for adventure. Not half a day passed before our adventure began. What are we going to do now?"

Anselm shook his head.

"This place is no longer safe for us," he said. "There are many who know that I live in the

vicinity. Millicent must go to the Lady Constance at once."

"You will not be able to take her," said Nanny quickly. "It would be too much of a risk. It would endanger both of you as well as Lady Millicent. Let me take her."

"It would be exactly as dangerous for you to try," said Anselm gloomily. "Every one knows that you were dismissed from the castle. They might think it was your plan for revenging yourself upon Lord Alford. It would go hard with you if you were caught. We must not endanger Lady Millicent."

With a single bound Giles was at Anselm's side. He laid an eager hand upon the man's arm and his eyes shone with enthusiasm.

"Let me do it!" he cried. "No one would suspect a mere boy. They would never think that you would trust me. We can go as strolling minstrels. They are always welcomed, both in the homes of the poor and the castles of the rich. People do not know that Millicent is trying to escape her wicked uncle. They think that she was kidnapped. Do let me try."

Anselm hesitated. Giles was only a boy but he was trustworthy. There was great danger but Giles was wise for his years. He had been trained to keep control of himself and could be trusted to keep Millicent out of unnecessary danger. After

all, their greatest danger was to be found in Anselm's presence. To save them both, Giles and Millicent, he must separate from them.

"We could pretend to be brother and sister," suggested Millicent. The idea of being a strolling minstrel pleased her.

Anselm looked at Nanny and she toward him. They could barely see each other in the gloom of the night.

"I think we had better let them try," she said gravely. "It is risky, but it is safer for them than if either of us was with them. It is also safer than keeping them here would be."

For several moments they discussed plans. It was decided that the start should be made that night.

"They will be searching for us to-morrow," said Giles. "This whole hillside will be searched." Just before he started, he ran to his rabbit hutch. The rabbits were huddled asleep in one corner. Carefully he lifted each out by its long ears and gave it its freedom. There would be no one around the cell to care for them for many days, for Anselm, too, was leaving. Never before had Giles slept away from the cell since first he was brought there. In all that time he had not gone five miles away from Avalon. Now he was going, and there was no telling when he would return, perhaps never, for from then on his life was to

belong to Lady Millicent, an exile from home. It was a strange feeling.

His life and the life of the Lady Millicent would depend upon his wisdom and bravery. It was a big responsibility and it made him shiver a little just to think of it.

Over the rock they climbed. It was very dark. They could barely see the faint outline of the road before them. At the base of the hill Nanny left them, taking the road that led to the village. Giles looked up at Anselm inquiringly.

"I am going to see you on your way," said Anselm.

Both children were eager to hurry, but Anselm held them to a steady, medium speed. "We must not get too tired at the first part of our long walk, for it will unfit us for the end of it," he cautioned.

They did not talk much. It seemed very strange to be starting on such a long journey on foot when the whole world about them seemed asleep. Millicent clung closely to her uncle's hand, shivering at every unexpected sound. She was not really afraid when he was there, but she dreaded the time when he would leave them. Giles, holding carefully his precious harp, was wondering what he should do if he were suddenly surrounded by half a dozen soldiers who recognized Millicent. It was not a pleasant thought. It was Anselm who broke the silence.

"We may never see each other again, Giles," he said in a quiet voice. The boy's hand closed convulsively over the man's arm, but he said nothing. "You will do as we have planned regarding Lady Millicent. I am putting her in your trust. You will stay by her until I return, guard her, fight for her, and die for her, if need be." Giles pressed his friend's arm, but did not speak. He was trying to crush down the big lump which rose in his throat. "I can trust you, lad," said Anselm solemnly.

"And you?" asked the boy. "What are you going to do?"

"I am going to collect money for King Richard," replied the man simply.

Again there was a silence. Giles was thinking about Anselm's plan. Oh, if he could only go to aid King Richard! How wonderful it would be! He hated to have Anselm leave him behind. He wanted to go. Surely if he went to King Richard with Anselm a chance would arise whereby he might show his bravery. Perhaps he could become a knight himself, if he served faithfully.

But there was Millicent! It was his duty to see that she reached Lady Constance safely. A knight should always do his duty faithfully. Otherwise, he was not fit to be a knight. Giles wanted to be worthy of knighthood, so he squared his shoulders and set his teeth. Anselm should never even know how much Giles wanted to go

with him. Anselm did know. He laid his hand on the boy's shoulder, and there was sympathy and understanding in the touch.

Millicent sighed heavily. It was very late and she was tired. She was not used to long tramps at night. Her eyes were heavy and her feet lagged. They had avoided going through the village for fear that they might be halted. Instead, by country lanes and across fields, Anselm led the way. They were going in the general direction of Spafford, the next town to Avalon, for the road north led through it and it was in that direction that they must go.

"We must skirt around the town," explained Anselm, "for the news of Millicent's loss will have spread far and wide."

Before they reached Spafford they left the road, and after stumbling across country for nearly half an hour, reached a little wood that crowned a small hill. It was there that Anselm decided that the first halt was to be made, and there he intended to leave them. Both Millicent and Giles were glad to stop, for the way had been long and darkness had made traveling very difficult. All three sat down at the foot of a big pine-tree. Anselm slipped from his shoulder a leathern pouch of generous size.

"Here is food," he explained. "Make it last as long as possible. The time will come when you

will have to ask for something to eat along the way or sing for it, but get as far from Avalon as you can before doing so. Watch your speech. Do not use the Norman language in the hearing of any one, for they are simple English peasants and hate the Normans. Giles, I am putting into your hands two packets. The smaller of the two give into the hands of the Lady Constance. Some churchman will read it to her. Keep the other hidden securely away until I come to you. Show it to no one. Do not open it yourself. Keep it, I say, until I come to you."

So saying, he handed two small packets to Giles, who instantly secreted them about his clothing.

"We trust you, Millicent," he said to her. "You are of the family of Avalon and, until Alford, the family has always been true to a trust. This is a secret that must go no farther. No one must know of this packet."

"I will never tell," she promised.

Again he turned to Giles.

"It may be that we shall never see each other again," he continued. "In that case it will be necessary for you to know the contents of the packet. If I do not return to you before you reach manhood, when you are grown-up, read the packet and do what you feel to be right about it."

It was all very puzzling and Giles felt his curiosity rising. What could be in that mysterious

packet? However, it was a part of knighthood to be trustworthy and, although he did not have a high-sounding name and was not the holder of fine castles and the owner of beautiful weapons, still, he was a knight inside and would scorn to betray a trust.

"I will do as you say," he said. Then Anselm made him repeat the orders that he had given, so that he might feel sure that there was no mistake.

For a few moments they sat talking about the trip to Lady Constance.

"Do not ask the way to the castle," cautioned Anselm. "People would consider that very strange. They would not understand what business peasant children would have with the lord of a castle and would suspect you."

"How shall we find our way?" asked Millicent.

"Ask for Lichester, the town. Say that you are going to friends," replied Anselm rising. "I must go now, for it will soon be dawn and I must not be seen with you."

For a moment he held both children very close. Then with, "God bless you and keep you, my children," he left them there on the hillside.

CHAPTER XI

SHELTER

IT was late in the morning when the children awoke. The sun was shining brightly, but so dense was the foliage above them that they were in the shade. Millicent was the first to awake. She rubbed her eyes, for a moment bewildered by her surroundings. The long, hard walk of the day before seemed like a fantastic dream. Had it really happened? The events of the whole preceding week seemed dreamlike and unreal.

For a few moments she lay quite still, looking up into the tree above her head. A little brown bird was making her nest there. She was busy weaving into it a long straw. Her mate was sitting upon the edge of the nest, apparently instructing her concerning the management of straws in general and this long one in particular.

The ground was rather hard, and the morning air was chilly although it was early summer. She scrambled to her feet and looked about her. Anselm had brought them to the top of a little hill. From it Millicent could see the little town of Spafford which they had avoided the night before. She knew that their destination lay far to the other side of the town. On the side away from the town

was rolling country. At the foot of the hill was a clear little brook.

With a hasty glance at the still sleeping Giles, Millicent ran down the hill. After drinking some of the water from her cupped hands she bathed herself, taking care not to rub too hard lest the brown come off her face and arms. She had jumped across brooks on horseback and had often seen them while out on her rides, but she had never dabbled or played in one before. She liked the ripple and wash of the brook as it tumbled over the stones in its bed. She liked the feeling of the water as it ran through her outstretched fingers.

Consequently she stayed longer by the brook than she had intended, and it was there that Giles found her.

"What a fright you gave me!" he said as he came up. "When I woke I looked for you, and you were not there. I imagined that you had been carried off by Alford's soldiers. I did not dare to call. As I looked down the hill I saw your blue dress and knew you were all right."

"I am sorry I gave you such a fright," said Millicent.

"Well, it's all right now that I know you are safe," replied Giles. "I should feel that I had failed badly if anything happened to prevent —" He stopped suddenly. "We've got to be careful

with what we say," he continued. "We must not forget that we are brother and sister singing our way to our grandmother's house in Lichester."

Giles then opened the leather pouch that Anselm had left beside them and took from it bread and cheese. The very large leaves of a tree furnished Millicent with an idea. She chose a large, flat rock for a table, set it prettily with the green leaves, and garnished it with a handful of spring blossoms. Both children decided that it was great fun to camp out. Giles felt very grown-up at having all the responsibility. His spirits had recovered.

As soon as they had eaten they started upon their way, for both were anxious to quickly put as great a distance between them and Avalon as possible. They made a wide detour about Spafford, keeping as much as possible to the hedges and woods. Once safely around that town Giles insisted upon going along the road.

"But people will see us so much more easily," protested Millicent.

"Yes," replied the boy, "but if folks see us hiding about at the edges of woods they will suspect us of wrong-doing. They might take us for thieves or runaways."

"How well you think things out," admired Millicent. "We've got to act just as if our trip was the commonest kind of a thing."

For some time they hurried along the road, keeping careful watch for passers-by. At last Millicent chuckled.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Giles, coming out of his make-believe of knights, beautiful horses, and fighting.

"I was thinking about our grandmother and making a picture of what I'd like to have her. I think she has soft, white hair and blue eyes. She lives in one of the tumble-down, thatched huts in the forest, and keeps geese and pigs. Her face is all wrinkled, but they are soft, pretty wrinkles."

"I'm quite fond of Grandfather," said Giles, readily falling into the game. "I guess he will need a strong, hearty man like me to take care of his garden. It hurts his back to stoop over for the weeds."

It was soon after this conversation that they met the first person that morning. He was on his way to the mill, evidently, for over his shoulder was a heavy bag. He was a big, jolly-looking man who smiled in a friendly way but asked no questions. Soon after passing him they came to a small farm. Some children were in the yard fondling a yellow puppy. The oldest was only about seven years old.

He was a plump little boy with big, round, blue eyes and a wide smile. He looked so much like the man whom the children had just passed that

they rightly guessed that they were father and son. He was a friendly, little fellow and insisted upon showing Millicent and Giles his puppy. Millicent fell quite in love with the soft, little baby thing. Giles, however, was not interested in dogs at that moment. His quick ear had caught the sound of little bells and he knew that some one on horseback was approaching.

Perhaps it was a soldier from Avalon. What should he do? If he could only make the soldier believe that he and Millicent lived at this farm. Just then he saw a goose that was waddling down to the small pond in back of the house.

"Will you show us your geese?" asked Giles. The little fellow nodded. Millicent looked at Giles in amazement, opened her lips to speak, thought better of it, and closed them. Then she, too, heard the bells and understood.

When the man-at-arms rode up to the farmhouse he saw three little peasants playing by the pond. He smiled for he had a family of his own, then rode on upon his search for the Lady Millicent who had been stolen from Avalon, little dreaming how near he had been to her.

"That was a narrow escape," said Millicent. "I know him. He is one of my uncle's men."

All that day they walked. During the afternoon they rested frequently. It had been a strange day. The weather had been beautiful that morn-

ing, but, as the day advanced, clouds began to pile up in the east.

"It is going to rain," said Giles gloomily.

The wind had risen. Millicent wrapped her long blue cape about her and shivered. She thought of the great fires on the hearth at home in the castle. Then she thought of the night that would be spent out in the open and shivered. She was very tired and a little bit cold. It is hard to be brave when one is cold and tired and when there is no prospect of a night's rest in a dry, comfortable place. Tear-drops gathered on her lashes and tumbled down upon the blue cape. She turned her head so that Giles would not see the telltale drops.

"I guess we had better stop in some house if we can get any one to take us in," said Giles heavily.

It took some time to reach the next farm. The rain began before they reached it and Millicent no longer had to turn her head to hide tears, for her face was wet with the rain. It was nearly dark when they reached the next cottage. Giles knocked at the door. There was the sound of footsteps, followed by the noise of a bolt being slipped out of its socket. A strong man stood there with a club in his hand. It was rather dangerous to open doors after nightfall, for outlaws of desperate character were about. He looked

huge against the firelight within. Millicent trembled with something else besides cold.

"We are caught without shelter," said Giles. "My sister is cold and it is raining. Will you let us remain here for the night?"

The man growled something under his breath. He seemed to hesitate, then turned to some one who was inside the room.

"Let them come in, Roger," said a pleasant voice, and a motherly woman came to the door. She ruthlessly pushed the man aside and drew the two children to the fire. Millicent held out wet, cold hands to the blaze.

"Who are you?" she asked as she took Millicent's wet cape. "How does it happen that you are alone by yourselves with night coming on?"

"Our mother and father are dead," said Millicent softly. "We are going to relatives farther north."

"You poor thing," said the woman hugging her. "How sad!"

Roger slipped the bolt back into place and came back to the fire. Seen close to, he did not look nearly so formidable.

"They are too tired to talk, Lisbeth," he said. "Better fill them up on hot milk and send them to bed."

It was a humble cottage with a single room. Rushes were spread over the floor. There was

very little furniture but the firelight cast homelike shadows. Outside the rain beat down upon the roof. It was so much better to be inside than out on such a night. Outside it was cold and everything was drenched with rain; inside it was warm and cosy.

"I am thankful," thought Giles. Then he thought of Anselm and the danger that he was in. "I hope he can get to Richard safely," was the last thing he thought of as he settled down for the night.

CHAPTER XII

AN UNEXPECTED EVENT

IT is not necessary to go into detail about the next two days. Nothing out of the ordinary happened. The people that they met took them for what they pretended to be—simple little waifs on their way to relatives farther north. Several times they sang for a meal. One night they went to bed hungry, that is, Giles went to bed hungry and Millicent unhappy. There had been a little left over from dinner which had been carefully put away in Giles's pouch. At supper-time the boy had made a great pretense of fair division, but in reality had given all of the food to Millicent. She did not discover this until she had finished eating but when she did, the tears came into her eyes.

"Oh, why didn't you keep half?" she almost wailed. "I wouldn't have eaten it all for the world, if I had known."

"Anselm told me to take care of you," replied the boy doggedly. "There wasn't really enough for even you. Besides, I am a boy and I want to be a knight. A knight is never selfish."

"Please divide fairly next time," she pleaded, and she looked so unhappy that Giles promised

that, at least, he would divide. He mentally made a reservation that he would divide as he saw fit and that Millicent should have the larger share. As for Millicent, she grieved all the evening.

"At all events," he told her, "the country people say that we shall reach a goodly town tomorrow, and where there are towns there are taverns and we always get well-fed when we sing there."

Millicent shivered. "Every time I open my mouth to sing, I shake with the fear that some one will recognize me."

"We are a long way from Avalon," comforted Giles. "I am not afraid that we will be recognized now. Besides, you do not look like the same girl that left the castle."

The trouble did not leave Millicent's face, but she said nothing. Somehow deep down in her heart was an unreasoning dread of the morrow. She tried to tell herself that it was all silliness and cowardliness, but the feeling persisted. It seemed as if some dark cloud hung over the future.

It was nearly noon of the next day when they reached the Wild Boar Tavern. Giles carried his harp in his hands. The day was bright, and it is much easier to be cheerful in the morning when the sun is shining than at dusk after a long day's tramp. Even Millicent had lost most of the dread

that she had vainly tried to suppress the night before.

The tavern was a shabby, old place, but there was quite a crowd of people about it. A fine lady in a coach had just ridden up and was alighting as the children reached the tavern. She was a pretty lady with a plain, dark, crimson dress. Her brown hair was arranged in two heavy braids which hung over her shoulders. It was evident to Millicent that she was a fine lady from some castle. She smiled at the two children as she passed.

"How pretty she was!" said Giles with admiration. "I envied all those knights their splendid horses and glittering armor and swords."

Meanwhile, the lady was speaking of the children to her husband.

"Did you notice those two pretty, little musicians?" she asked him.

"I only noticed the usual rabble, Constance," replied the knight.

"They were unusually fine-looking children for waifs," replied Lady Constance thoughtfully. "I should like to speak with them."

"We'll get our dinner to-day," said Giles exultantly. "We always fare better when there are fine folk at the taverns." He noted the fact that there seemed to be quite a crowd there. "When there are many people to entertain, the innkeeper is always more generous."

"We could keep right on making our way along by singing if we wanted to do so," said Millicent with some pride. "Oh, look!" she exclaimed, pointing up the road. "Here comes another troupe of minstrels. They have harps as well as you and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if those little dogs were trained to do tricks. Maybe we won't get our dinner after all."

Giles looked rather carelessly at the newcomers. He noted that there were several men and women and six children of various sizes. A meek-faced donkey dragged a small cart which seemed to hold all their worldly possessions. They seemed an especially ragged and unattractive lot. They were very dirty.

"I don't think much of them," said the boy critically. "We'll do our best and not let their coming bother us. I wish that I had a dog, though. Look at that splendid, big, shaggy fellow!"

Something had dropped from the cart, unnoticed by all except the dog. He had picked it up and brought it to his master who had rewarded him with a rebuke and a cut of the whip.

"The brute!" exclaimed Giles, white with indignation. He took one step forward to reprove him, but Millicent's hand on his arm restrained him. He had no right to endanger her safety by getting mixed up in a quarrel.

"I think that our singing will appeal to them

more than anything that rabble can do," whispered Giles.

So it proved. Giles's wit, the music of his harp, and the sweet, fresh, little voice of the Lady Millicent went right to their listeners' hearts. Even the tall knight that Giles had admired so when he had ridden up smiled in approval, and the fine lady in crimson patted Millicent's cheek.

"Where are you going, my child?" she asked kindly. "You are too sweet a child to be subjected to the dangers of the road."

"We are going to friends farther north," replied Millicent.

"We came from that direction," said the lovely lady kindly. "I think that if we were returning that way I should take you along with us."

"Why did you say such a thing as that?" asked her husband later. "Has the pretty little singer turned your head?"

"I do not know," replied Lady Constance. "Somehow that boy reminds me of some one, I cannot think who. The little lass was a sweet little girl. They are vastly different from such as these." She waved a disdainful hand toward the ragged little group that was trying to attract her attention and retired to her apartment, her husband accompanying her.

The innkeeper set out a good dinner for the children and they ate heartily, not noticing the

black looks that were being cast upon them by the other entertainers, who had not fared as well. Neither did they notice that the burly man with the black whiskers, who seemed to own the other troupe, was in earnest consultation with his rather thin, sad-faced wife in one corner, or that they were casting meaningful glances at them.

Giles was perfectly absorbed in the big, shaggy dog. He seemed to understand every word that was spoken to him.

"If we could get hold of those two," Rod was saying to his wife. "They would turn up a pretty penny for us."

"They seem to be traveling alone," replied his wife. "You will not have much trouble with them if you are careful."

"We'll get them after they leave the tavern," replied Rod. "Let them get out into the open country where no one will hear their yells and we can take them forcibly, or we could take them here saying that you are their mother from whom they ran away."

"The first plan is better," decided Lize. "I think I can get them to travel in our company if we pretend to be going their way and, once in our hands, they will never escape."

"I'll let you do the talking," grinned Rod. "You've a tongue as smooth as butter. I'll do the beating, if need be. That young fellow holds his

head too high. He would be better for a sound drubbing."

Meanwhile, Giles and Millicent ate a hearty meal, unaware that any plot was being made to injure them or to prevent them from carrying out Anselm's orders. Giles had the two precious packets tucked safely away in his ragged smock. He would not feel easy in his mind until he had turned over the smaller one to the Lady Constance, Millicent's aunt.

"How far is it to Lichester?" asked Giles turning to the burly, yet jolly innkeeper.

"It is a good two days' walk for a strong man," replied the innkeeper, "going due north. We have fine guests at the inn now that came from Lichester way. They are one of the finest old families in all England. Why, the Lady ——"

There was a great shout from the yard which interrupted his sentence and brought them all to the door. There were the tall knight and his lovely lady, the jolly-faced innkeeper, the ragged singers, and Giles and Millicent. An exhausted rider on a jaded, foam-flecked horse drew up before the tavern. The tall knight, recognizing the rider as one of his own knights, strode to the horse's side.

"What is it, Arnold?" he asked sternly.

"John is definitely hindering those engaged in collecting ransom money for the king," he said.

“Two of the messengers have been put to death by men who seemed to be outlaws. One of these outlaws escaped, but one fell into the hands of our band. He was one of John’s men, disguised as an outlaw. Under torture, he confessed that John is at the bottom of this plan to prevent ransom being collected for Richard.”

“Heaven help England if Richard is not brought back to his kingdom,” said the tall knight heavily.

“And heaven have mercy upon the Lady Millecent and Avalon as well,” said Giles to himself.

CHAPTER XIII

AN ENEMY'S WISH COMES TRUE

THE knights pledged to gather funds for the ransom were in grave danger. Two of them had been already killed. Anselm himself was going to take part in that dangerous mission, if he had not already started. This was the burden of Giles's thoughts as they silently trudged along the dry, dusty road that led north. If King Richard was not rescued from the hateful German prison, there would be no prospect of the Lady Millicent's regaining her castle, for Alford would win John's support with promises and gifts of silver and fighting men. John would gain nothing by befriending Millicent, and the fact that her cause was right would have no influence with such a man as he. Giles determined to say nothing of his gloomy thoughts to Millicent for there was no sense in worrying her unnecessarily, but Millicent had a very good head of her own.

"I guess that I shall lose my castle after all," she said thoughtfully.

"We will carry out Anselm's plan just the same," said Giles.

Neither Giles nor Millicent noticed that they

were being followed by Rod's troupe. Perhaps this was because Rod took particular pains not to be seen. He and Lize did not want to catch up with the children while they were near houses. They wanted a lonely, secluded spot where no outcry would be heard, in case Giles or Millicent objected to being added to their troupe. Giles and Millicent were also on the lookout for a remote place where they might stay for the night.

It was well toward night when they finally reached open country. Giles and Millicent were busy preparing their evening meal when Rod and Lize caught up with them. The rest of the troupe, with the exception of one or two dogs, had remained out of sight around the bend of the road. As had been arranged, Lize did all of the talking. Both Giles and Millicent agreed that she was a pleasant-speaking woman. She showed Millicent one of the trained dogs which she had not seen at the tavern. It was a tiny dog covered with silky, white curls.

Soon they were talking away like old friends. Millicent went into raptures over Lize's baby which was done up in a shawl and bound to her back. He was a thin, dark-eyed little fellow with long, slender fingers. He would be beautiful if he were a wee bit fatter. Lize obligingly let Millicent take the little fellow in her arms. She had never held a baby before. She smiled, even when

the little hand tangled itself in her curls and pulled hard.

"He's taken a fancy to you, dearie," said the woman, patting Millicent on the head, "but how could he help it, such a nice, sweet, little lady as you are. Tell me, my love, where are you going all alone by yourselves? Your brother is a rare young one to be on the road without an older person with him. I can see that you have been well cared for by the fatness of you."

"We are going to friends," replied Millicent. "Our mother is dead."

"You poor lamb," sympathized Lize, and she and her husband exchanged glances of satisfaction. "Where did you say these friends lived?"

"Near Lichester," said Giles rather shortly. He disliked talking with strangers. He especially disliked talking about his plans.

"Lichester!" exclaimed the woman. "Why, that is where we are going! I dread the trip through the forest."

"Forest?" asked Giles.

"Yes," replied Lize. "I went through it once. We were chased by outlaws. Our donkey and everything of any value that we possessed was taken from us and my poor husband was beaten black and blue. It seemed as if every tree in the forest hid an outlaw. I shudder whenever I think of it." Millicent shivered. She was naturally timid.

"You had never planned to go through the forest alone?" exclaimed Lize in horror. "Why, you would never reach the other side in safety!"

"You'd better come along with us," put in Rod. "There is quite a troupe of us, so no one will molest us. We are going to Lichester, too."

Giles and Millicent exchanged glances. Lize's story had badly frightened Millicent.

"Let us go along with them as they have been so kind as to ask us," she pleaded.

Giles agreed half reluctantly. Somehow the plan did not please him. He could not tell why. Perhaps it was because he had seen Rod cuff that wonderful, shaggy dog. However, if the way was really dangerous it would be much safer to travel in company. He thought it would be easy to slip away from their new friends when they neared Lichester.

Soon the rest of the troupe came up. There were several children in it. They seemed shy and wild. Neither Millicent nor Giles could get them to talk.

Somehow, after they joined the troupe, they did not make such good time as they had before. Lize complained that it was hard to walk fast with a heavy baby. Giles grew impatient. Now that they were so far from Avalon he felt that there would be no danger from Alford. He wanted to reach the safe shelter and give Millicent over to

the kind hands of Lady Constance. How surprised he would be to know that the Lady Constance had seen them, that it had been she in the crimson gown. She had stroked Millicent's cheek. How much trouble would have been avoided if the innkeeper had only finished his sentence and had told Giles who the fine knight from Lichester and the lovely lady were.

Another thing troubled the boy. They had left the road that ran due north and had turned into country byways. It was true that Rod had said that he knew a way which was a trifle longer than the other but which avoided the dangerous forest, but the innkeeper had said that two days of walking would bring them to Lichester and they were on the third day. It was so dark with clouds that for two days Giles could not tell the direction by the sun.

He became suspicious. Rod's pleasantness was beginning to wear thin. Twice he spoke sharply to Giles and once to Millicent.

"I'm going to find the way back," said Giles wrathfully. "I think I did wrong to come this way. We should have stuck by the road we knew."

"But the forest and the outlaws," said Millicent. Lize's story had frightened her badly.

"They would find nothing worth the taking on us," replied Giles. "I am not going to put up with Rod any longer."

"I don't like Lize as well as I did," replied Millicent. "She scolded me last night for refusing to carry little Rod any farther. I love little Rod, but my back was nearly broken."

"She had no right to scold you, though. You do not belong to her. We will not stay with them any longer. I am going back."

There was a crackling of the bushes behind them, and out stepped Rod. In his hand was the long, snake-like, dog whip. He grasped Giles's arm and shook him until his teeth rattled. Millicent screamed.

"Stop that noise," cried the man taking her by the arm, "and listen to me. You are going to stay here with us. You are going to sing for us. If you try to escape the dogs will give us warning and you both will be thrashed within an inch of your lives."

"We will not work for you," cried Giles. "You have no right to us."

The long whip curled out and fell upon the boy's shoulder which was poorly protected by his peasant smock. It was the first time that Giles had ever been struck. For a moment he stood rigid, white with passion. Millicent again screamed.

It was her scream that brought the boy back to himself. He had been furious, ready to turn on Rod with tooth and nail, but he must control his wrath for her sake. His strength could never pre-



THERE WAS A CRACKLING OF THE BUSHES BEHIND THEM, AND
OUT STEPPED ROD.—*Page 160.*

vail over Rod's. It was childish to think it would, for Rod was a burly man. Millicent, too, seemed to realize that apparent submission was their wiser course for she put out her hand and touched the whip.

"We will do what you want us to," she said.
"Please do not strike again."

Rod looked from her to the white-faced Giles.

"Do you agree to that?" he growled.

"We will play and sing for you," replied Giles steadily.

It seemed a strange twist of fate. The very thing that Lord Alford had planned for his niece had become a reality. She was a prisoner in the hands of outlaws, for Rod and his wandering tribe were no better than thieving rogues. However, Giles was with her, watching over her and doing all in his power to make things easier and always on the watch for a chance to escape.

Rod and Lize, however, were as clever as they were wicked. Rarely did Giles and Millicent get a chance to talk privately. On one occasion Millicent whispered, "We must make it seem as if we liked this kind of a life. We'll never get a chance to escape if they think we are trying."

Giles agreed. "It is going to be hard to pretend a liking that I do not feel," he said gloomily. "I can't lie about it for knights never lie." Somehow knighthood seemed very far away since they

had been forcibly added to the troupe. "We live like animals that have to snatch their food. I hate it."

"I love little Rod," replied Millicent. "I'm going to begin with him. Lize loves him, too, and when she sees that I do, I think she will like me better. I am going to try as hard as I can to make her love me. I'll help her cheerfully."

"I like the dogs," said Giles thoughtfully. "Already they obey me better than any one else, for they obey me because they love me and want to please me, and they obey the others through fear. I think Shag would do anything I wanted him to. Perhaps I can help train them. Rod said that he would have me showing off the dogs."

"We mustn't change all at once," warned Millicent. "Look, here come Rod and Sal!"

Rod carried a bag over his shoulder. Sal, a girl perhaps as old as Millicent, was wearing Millicent's dress. Lize had made Millicent exchange her own pretty but simple dress for her own daughter's rags. The man pulled two puppies out of the bag and handed them to Giles.

"You have a way with the critters," he said. "See what you can do with these."

Before his conversation with Millicent, Giles would not have allowed himself to show his pleasure in the pretty little creatures, but now he looked at things differently.

"Oh, I like them! I'll train them," he exclaimed, joyfully hugging both puppies until they yelped. "Thank you for letting me do it."

Rod grunted rather ungraciously, but that night he told Lize that, given time, both children would settle down contentedly enough.

That evening marked a decided change in the attitude of both boy and girl to their new order of living. Millicent relieved the tired Lize of much of the care of little Rod. That night while Lize was concocting a savory stew of material that Rod brought home after a successful raid, Millicent entertained baby Rod. He was a pretty baby with great, dark eyes and cunning fingers that would be dimpled if they were not so thin. Millicent pat-a-caked with him to his heart's content. When he was tired of play, she sang him to sleep with the little lullaby that Nanny had so often sung to her.

How long ago it seemed since she was a child of a castle, petted and deferred to in all cases! How long it seemed since she had bidden her Uncle Anselm good-by! It seemed like the life of a different child and yet it turned out to be not as disagreeable as she had feared. Lize and Rod were easy-going as long as things went smoothly, and both Giles and Millicent took pains to see that things did go smoothly.

"Do you know," confided Millicent one night,

"I really do believe that I am getting to like this life after all. That was a pretty good stew I made, now wasn't it?"

Giles agreed that it was. He added that he had never tasted a better stew in all his life.

As time went on, Rod and Lize kept a more negligent watch upon them. They often had chances to talk together. Neither cared particularly for the other children in the troupe, nor did the children care for them. Wherever Giles went he was surrounded by the dogs. He taught them several new tricks. The puppies that Rod had stolen were clever and learned quickly. One seemed particularly fond of Giles, but the other loved Millicent.

Nearly a month passed by. It was now midsummer, and camping along the roadside was pleasant. Neither Giles nor Millicent had any notion of where they were. Both had lost all sense of direction. They had stopped at many taverns and market-places. They were not the higher class of singers that amused the knights at castles. They earned or stole from the humbler folk of the countryside.

Rod and Lize were well satisfied with the success of their plan. People seemed to enjoy the pretty little singers.

"Who would have thought they would have settled down so comfortably?" said Lize to Rod. "They have not tried to escape once. I was afraid

the boy had a strong will and would make much trouble."

"Oh, a touch or two of the whip," replied Rod.
"It will bring a boy around every time."

And, meanwhile, Giles said nothing. He trained the dogs, helped Rod cheerfully, and was on the watch every moment for a chance of escape. So it went along until one evening Giles heard Rod say to Lize, "Next comes Spafford and then Avalon."

CHAPTER XIV

GUILBERT

SPAFFORD and Avalon! A fear clutched at the boy's heart for the Lady Millicent was being taken back into the very heart of the danger from which she had run. He must devise some means of escape and do it quickly, for they would be recognized at Avalon. Even if the little lady of the castle did look very different from the tattered, dark-haired, Gypsy child, he was the same Giles, and he was well-known at the tavern. Moreover, the whole countryside knew by this time that it was Anselm that had taken Lady Millicent of Avalon. He was as well-known as the boy who made his home with him. If they escaped detection it would be only by a miracle.

If Richard were really dead there would be practically no danger, for Alford was John's friend, but Richard was not dead. He was alive, and every day the amount of money being collected for his ransom was growing. England was loyal to her rightful king and, in spite of the disloyalty of John, was determined to save him. Alford, a well-known traitor to Richard, would stand little chance if Millicent was alive. With her out of the way, he was the heir to Avalon. Black fear

was in Giles's heart as the thoughts of her capture flashed into his mind.

There was no chance of escape at night, for the dogs would be sure to betray them. For a moment he thought of telling Rod that Avalon was their home but, knowing that he would soon hear the story of the lost Millicent, was afraid that he might guess who the child he had captured really was. In that case he might be tempted to sell her into Lord Alford's hands. It was a thoughtful boy who lay awake looking at the stars when the rest of the camp were asleep.

He did not tell Millicent of their plight, for he did not want to frighten her until it was necessary. She noticed his gloom but laid it to another cause. The night before his discovery Giles had had an argument with Rod, which led to his being beaten. The boy had refused to steal the ingredients of a stew for the evening meal. To live up to the high standard of knighthood and still be a wandering minstrel in the hands of unscrupulous vagrants often proved difficult. Even a true knight placed in such circumstances would have found it next to impossible to live up to his high ideals. Therefore, when the curling whip smote upon his bared back, he had gritted his teeth together, winked back the angry tears that wanted to come to his eyes, and had borne it without a whimper. It was Millie-
gent who had shed tears over it, and her heart had

been filled to the brim with sorrow for him and anger for Rod. She thought it not to be wondered at that Giles should be less talkative than usual.

As for Giles, he had lain down upon his bed of hay that night with a very sore back, yet with a rather exalted feeling of having proved that he could suffer for the right.

Because the sore back kept him awake longer than usual he had heard what Rod said about going to Avalon. It had given him much to think about. Thinking, however, did not seem to bring good results and, after much turning and twisting, he had at last dropped off to sleep.

There was no chance of escape the next morning. Although Rod and Lize had slackened their vigilance, it would be impossible to evade the dogs. They followed Giles continuously, with noisy show of affection. He could hardly stir without one of them at his heels, begging for a caress. Rod had trained them by fear. Giles loved them. His was the first tender hand that had touched them, and they loved him with a love that exceeded all bounds.

Late that afternoon they entered Spafford, the town Giles and Millicent had avoided on their way north. It was not until she saw the town that Millicent discovered where she was. As the meaning of it reached her a look of blank dismay, followed by terror, came into her eyes. It was fortu-

nate that none of the others saw the look. Giles laid a strong hand on her wrist.

"Keep your eyes open, and stay close to me!" he whispered.

Both children took pains to keep close to the other singers. They were anxious to escape all notice for as long as possible, but both knew that when they got up to perform before the men-at-arms at the tavern it would be a dangerous moment.

Time seemed both to drag and to fly by on wings. Giles turned over many plans. He considered telling Rod part of the danger. He thought of pretending to be very sick, unable to take part in the night's performance. He knew, however, that Rod would have no patience or pity and would force him to put the dogs through their tricks.

"Tumble your hair about your eyes," he cautioned, "and keep your face hidden as much as you can."

All too soon they reached the market-place. It put Rod into excellent spirits to see that there was quite a crowd about town. He decided that the market-place would be the best place for the performance.

Rod opened the affair with a juggling trick. It consisted of the clever handling of half a dozen eggs. The eggs were hard boiled, but the audience did not know that. Four or five were in the air at

the same time. The delighted audience gasped at the quick turn of his wrist.

Meanwhile, Giles and Millicent scanned the faces of the crowd, hoping that they would not see any one who would recognize them. Of course, their biggest danger would come when they reached Avalon, but Spafford was not far away and, as it had been more than barely possible that the news of Millicent's capture had reached the town, it was quite likely that some one would recognize Giles in the crowd. The egg play was followed by one more difficult, with two short swords.

After Rod brought his juggling to a close it was Millicent's turn. Her sweet little voice went up, up, up like a bird's. It was difficult for her to keep the quaver of fear out of it, but she did very well. Giles and the dogs would come next. Just as the boy stepped out into the open space a new group joined the audience. They were men-at-arms. Giles did not notice them at first.

He was busy keeping his eye on four dogs at once. The dogs obeyed him perfectly, going through their tricks with a sprightly grace that delighted the audience. The newcomers pushed their way through the crowd that surrounded the troupe to see what it was that was attracting so much attention. As the last dog ran to his place under the cart, Giles looked up. There, not more

than a dozen feet from him, regarding him with amazed recognition was Guilbert, his enemy, Anselm's enemy, and Millicent's enemy.

For a moment the two stood like statues. Fear, white-faced despairing terror, looked out of Giles's eyes, but it was not fear of what might happen to him. Lady Millicent of Avalon was in danger. It was his duty to protect her, but he did not know what to do.

Before the boy had time to decide what would be the best thing to do, the man's great hand gripped his shoulder. There was savage triumph upon his face.

"I have you at last," he gloated. "Now you will tell me what you have done with the Lady of Avalon." His voice was savage, although it was a whisper. Giles writhed in his grasp and tried in vain to escape. There was no one who would help him, no one whom he might trust.

He was mistaken there. Rod had no idea of letting Giles slip through his fingers. What he had taken he meant to keep. Hastily ordering Lize to get out of the crowd with the dogs and children, he pushed his way to where Giles was standing with Guilbert. There had been no scene. Guilbert's whispered menace was heard by Giles alone. The boy had made no outcry.

Neither saw Rod's approach. With a swift motion he disengaged the man's hand upon the boy's

shoulder and, at the same moment, tripped him. Guilbert fell heavily. His heavy armor made rising difficult. Giles and Rod slipped into the crowd like two shadows. By the time the highly angered Guilbert regained his footing, they were at a safe distance from him.

Rod and Giles did not run away from the place. It would have made them too conspicuous. Rapid walking and some dodging soon brought them away from the place of danger.

"Why was he after you?" asked Rod abruptly, as they drew near to the caravan. Giles had been expecting some such question and had been turning over in his mind all of the possible answers he might make, yet for a moment he hesitated.

"We used to live near here," he replied.

Rod took hold of the boy's arm with so tight a grasp that it hurt. "Oh!" he exclaimed. "So that is your game. That is what you wanted, to have your armor-clad friend rescue you. Well, he will do well if he gets you out of my grasp. What I have, I hold."

While he talked Giles thought, and thought hard. Perhaps it was just as well to have Rod think that Guilbert was trying to rescue him. It was evident that Rod had no thought of letting Guilbert take him. He would protect the children to the best of his ability.

"You will not be able to keep us," the boy re-

plied. "That man has friends who are also men-at-arms. They will help him get me back. I would not be surprised if they came riding after us this very night. They may wait until night and come upon you then."

"We'll be ready for them," boasted Rod, but Giles noted with satisfaction that he seemed troubled at the prospect.

As soon as they reached the others Lize and Rod had a long conversation together. They talked in low tones, looking about them furtively. Meanwhile Giles and Millicent talked in low tones and looked about them fearfully. Millicent had been crying. Her eyes were red and swollen.

"I was afraid that I should never see you," she whispered. "When I saw Guilbert take hold of you, it took away all the strength I had. Oh, Giles, Giles, what is going to happen to us?"

The boy shook his head. "I don't know," he replied miserably. "We've just got to wait."

They did not have to wait long for, after a few minutes' earnest conversation with his wife, Rod came to them.

"Come!" he said curtly.

"Where to?" asked Giles, holding back.

The man's only answer was an oath, followed by a savage jerk. That he was troubled, Giles could easily see. At all events he was trying to keep them from Guilbert and Alford, which was what

Giles wanted. In silence the man led them through the gathering dusk, casting furtive glances about him as he went.

"Fortunate," he remarked softly, "that it happened here, for well I know the countryside."

After a good half-hour walk, they came to an old barn. Without saying a word, Rod threw open the door and thrust them within. Millicent shrank back in terror.

"Oh, don't leave us in this horrid place," she wailed, terrified at the gloom of the strange barn and forgetting that this might turn into a chance for escape.

"Hush!" said Rod savagely. "Do you think that I am going to have you rescued by friends in the locality? No, my pretty little singers, what Rod has, Rod holds."

"Until it is taken," said a low voice near by, from the depths of the barn. All three whirled toward the invisible speaker. Rod's grasp on Giles's arm tightened. It was fairly uncanny to hear speech from so deserted a locality.

"Who are you?" asked Rod quaveringly. He had a wholesome fear for ghosts and the low hollow tone had seemed to him to hold nothing that was human in it. A low cry, rising into a shriek so unearthly as to make the hair on Rod's head tingle, was the only answer for a moment. Millicent was crying and, as for Giles, he was tense with

excitement. From out the barn stepped a tall, mail-coated figure. The faint, lingering light of the west made a menacing gleam on casque helmet and shield. It flashed upon the long sword in the mailed hand. The other hand dropped the shield and grasped the frightened Rod. With a swift, strong push of the arm the unhappy man was thrust into the barn. Then came the clang of the door and the grating of the rusty bolt as it swung into place. Giles and Millicent, too terrified and surprised to move from their places, gazed with awe at the tall figure beside them.

“Giles, Giles,” spoke the voice again. “Do you not know me, lad?”

For answer Giles flung himself against the tall figure that had held him so often. “Anselm! Oh, Anselm!” was all that he could say.

CHAPTER XV

THE ESCAPE

EXPLANATIONS quickly followed. Anselm's sudden appearance seemed almost like magic.

"I was in the market-place this afternoon," he told them. "I saw Guilbert and his attack upon you. Had not the Gypsy come to help you I should have done so, but it was far better that this fellow should help you for, if I should again be mixed up in a quarrel with Guilbert, it would mean another fight, and the whole street was filled with his friends."

"How did it happen that you were in Spafford?" asked Millicent. "I thought that you were going to collect money for the king."

"Besides," went on Giles, "Avalon is so close I should think you would be afraid to come here."

"It is true that I have been with others collecting money for our good king," went on Anselm, "but, in going from castle to castle, I drew near the place where I was born and, in spite of the ancient quarrel between my brother and me, I decided to put pride in my pocket and go to him, partly because I knew that he would help in rescuing the king, and partly to see whether you had safely reached Lichester. You can imagine my

grief when I found that neither Lady Constance nor Lord Sibert, my brother, had seen you. It is enough to say that Sibert and I made up our quarrel and now are friends, and that at once I set out to find you. I have been on the road for weeks, and I know that Lord Alford is on the search for you as well."

"We must move quickly to get away from him, for Guilbert will start a search," said Giles with a nervous glance behind him. "Hark!" he exclaimed. "I hear footsteps."

For a moment they stood motionless, listening intently. The sound came closer, but it did not sound like the footsteps of a man. Then came a soft whine. A shaggy form leaped upon the boy. Giles's arms closed about his friend.

"It's Shag!" he exclaimed joyfully. "He has tracked our footsteps." Anselm fondled the faithful dog. Giles was delighted that dog and man liked each other from the very first.

"How long have you been looking for us?" asked Millicent, slipping her small hand into her uncle's big one.

"For over a week," he replied gravely. "My work in collecting money for the king's ransom took me to Lichester on my way beyond. My brother told me that he and Lady Constance had been away at the time you might have reached Lichester. It seems that there is trouble between

him and one of his neighbors which he expects to come to a head soon. He wanted to visit the castle of a friend, partly to get help from him and partly to get one of his sons, who has been a page at his friend's castle. Finding that in some way our plans had come to naught, I, at once, started back to Avalon, fearing that you had fallen into the hands of Alford. To-night I saw you at the market-place in Spafford."

"What are we going to do?" asked Giles.

"There is only one thing to do," replied Anselm.
"We must go to Lichester."

They walked a long way that night. It made Millicent think of the other night of secret travel the three had made, over a month before. Then she had been so tired and exhausted that she had hardly been able to keep up to the others, but her life among the Gypsies had done much to strengthen and harden her to travel on foot. It was wonderful to have Anselm's strength to rely on. Her heart was filled with relief at their escape from the Gypsies.

Giles was downcast for, although he had been perfectly delighted to see Anselm and a huge load of responsibility had rolled off his shoulders, when he discovered the identity of the tall armor-clad figure at the barn, another kind of weight lay upon his heart. He felt that he had failed, that he had not carried through the trust imposed upon him.

Much later, when they had stopped to rest, Millicent fell asleep almost immediately, but trouble kept Giles wakeful.

Anselm leaned up against a tree, after removing as much of his armor as possible. The boy's head rested upon the man's arm.

"I have failed in my trust," he said, in a low voice.

The man's hand was laid over the boy's.

"Did you open the packet?" he asked sternly. Giles looked at him with reproach, although in the darkness the man could not see the look.

"No," he replied, touching his ragged blouse. "It is here. Rod made Millicent give up her dress for his own girl, but my smock was old in the first place, so he left it with me. It is not that."

"How, then, did you fail in your trust?"

Giles's voice broke. "I did not get Lady Millicent to Lady Constance," he replied. "I tried to do a knightly thing and I failed." He dropped his head and burrowed it into Anselm's arm.

"Lad, dear lad, you did your best. Do I not know what it means to seem to fail? You would have given your life for Lady Millicent if it would have done any good. Twelve years ago I would have given my life to prevent the murder of my sister's husband, the Lady Millicent's father, but it was to no avail. I could not save him. I was wounded and left for dead in the attempt. All I

could do was to prevent the wicked Alford from reaping the benefits for which he did the deed. I did my best, and you did yours. We must both rise from our defeat and face the new conditions. Crushed to earth, we must arise."

"Would you trust me again?" breathed Giles.

"With my life," answered Anselm.

The boy drew a long sigh of relief. He had failed, but it was not through cowardice or lack of effort. Till now he had known but one interpretation of the word failure. He might still have a chance to prove himself worthy of knighthood, although knighthood might never be awarded him.

"I will be true," he whispered to himself and then, being a true healthy boy, tired from the excitement of the day with its danger and long, fatiguing trip, he turned over and was soon fast asleep.

The next two or three days passed quickly and without incident. By keeping to the byways, and traveling largely by night and very early morning, they rapidly lessened the distance between themselves and their destination. Their course had been a broken one, for Anselm wanted to leave no trail which could be followed by an enemy. The fact that Shag had followed and found them, because he could not bear to be parted from his master, was fortunate. What Shag had done for love, any of the other dogs might do at the bidding

of Rod. Therefore, the scent must be broken so that no dog could follow it.

This they did by walking or rather wading up a small brook for several hundred feet, and by continuing their way in the hot, dry sand of the road-bed. As the hours passed, with no reason for alarm, their spirits rose. Soon they would reach Lichester.

CHAPTER XVI

LICHESTER

IT was late in the afternoon of the third day that the tower-crowned castle of Lichester came into sight. Giles's heart beat high at the sight of its huge bulk, outlined against the evening sky. Here he would get his chance to prove himself worthy of knighthood. Here he would meet other boys who would be his companions in deeds of valor.

"How can a boy, who is only a page, show himself to have a knightly heart?" he asked Anselm.

"By doing the duty that lies nearest him faithfully, cost what it may," replied the man at his side.

"What a fine, large castle it is," said the boy enthusiastically. "I can see the moat of water about it, but I miss the hill. A castle should be built on a hill, so that all the world can look up to it and to all the bravery it contains. I like the looks of Lichester Castle, but it is not so fine as Avalon."

"No," repeated Millicent sadly, "it is not so fine as Avalon."

For some time they walked on toward Lichester. Anselm was sure that they could reach the castle before nightfall, if they walked rapidly. He was

glad the long, hard trip was so nearly over. He would not be satisfied until both Giles and Millicent were safely turned over to Lord Sibert and the lovely Lady Constance.

Giles was silent, thinking with eager anticipation of the fine things he would see. He was building up in his mind occasions by which he might win glory and honor. Perhaps he could save Lord Sibert's life by hurling himself in front of an enemy's spear. He might rescue the Lady Constance from a band of outlaws. It was a pleasant thought, and he smiled as he swung along toward his castle of dreams.

Millicent, only, dreaded to reach Lichester. The journey had been very pleasant to her since Anselm had snatched them out of the hands of the outlaws. She had lost her castle. Richard was gone. John was sure to reward Alford's loyalty to himself by giving to him the fine, old castle. He would make Alford Duke of Avalon. She did not want to go before Lady Constance dressed in the rags she was wearing. She felt sure that the close friendship which had grown up between Giles and herself would be lost when she was turned over to the Lady Constance, and he was made a page. She would have to learn how to make fine stitches upon tapestry, and would be shut away from all the adventures that Giles and Anselm would be having.

It would be much more fun, she thought, if she and Giles and Anselm could live in a hut in the forest. They could hunt, and she would keep the house sweet and clean for them. When they came home, tired and hungry, she would have a delicious stew waiting for them. That would be much more pleasant than going before a disdainful group of fine ladies, dressed in a ragged gown that was stained with days of travel. No, Millicent was sorry that they were so near the end of their journey.

It was still light when they passed through the little town of Lichester. The peasants came from their pretty, thatched cottages and stared at the strangers. They wondered why a knight of so noble a bearing as Anselm should have anything to do with two ragged, little beggars.

Through the one street of Lichester they went. Anselm, rejoicing that they were nearing their destination, unconsciously quickened his pace. Giles, spurred on by excitement, did likewise. It seemed to Millicent that they had never before gone so fast. She tried to keep up with them, but her heart was not in it. At last Anselm noticed her dejection, and questioned her. She could not put her doubts into words so she merely said that she was very tired.

After that they walked more slowly. The castle, they discovered, was farther off than they had

thought. It grew dark so quickly that, much to Giles's disappointment and Millicent's joy, Anselm decided to stop at the Blue Boar, a tavern in Lichester.

The Blue Boar was slightly larger than any of the other houses in Lichester. Over the door hung a sign-board that creaked and rattled in every breath of wind. A hideous, blue creature was painted upon the sign-board. Inside, in spite of the warmth of the summer evening, a fire was burning on the hearth, and soon trenchers of savory meat were placed before the hungry travelers.

The next morning Millicent woke early. A hostler was watering his horse at the well in the yard, and it was his loud voice that had awakened the girl. She ran to the window that faced Lichester Castle. It looked very grand and beautiful against the morning sky.

The hostler drew water from the well for his horse and then paused to speak to one of the maids at the tavern. She had come out with one of the big, crockery pitchers for water. The hostler gallantly drew it for her.

The sight of the water made Millicent thirsty. She was very dusty, as well. It would be a good chance to wash away the dust of the journey. A wooden bucket tied to a long rope was near the well. She lowered it into the depths of the well. There was a dull thud when it touched the water.

With some difficulty, because it was very heavy, she drew it out of the well. After a good drink of the cold, clear water, she bathed her face and arms.

Most of the dark stain that had been put upon them had worn off, leaving her skin white. Her hair was still dark at the ends but, up around her face and close to the head where the new hair was growing out, it was as golden as before. It was very dirty. After a few moments' consideration she did her best to wash it also. When it was washed, she rubbed it as dry as possible and shook it out.

By this time Giles and Anselm were up. Soon, after a hearty meal, they again started on their way.

It was a beautiful day. A soft haze of purplish hue clung close to distant mountains. The road wound through fields already beginning to yellow under the hot summer sun. The castle loomed up before them, the goal of their dreams.

“Look!” exclaimed Millicent as they drew nearer. “The great drawbridge is raised. That seems strange to me, at this time in the morning. In times of peace it is usually lowered.”

“I know something about it,” replied Giles. “I heard the men at the tavern talking about it last night. They said that Lord Sibert is no friend of John’s, and that he is afraid that if he does not

hold his castle by force it may be wrested from him."

"News has also come that Glendale, who is Lord of Gillies, the next duchy, will probably lead out his men against Sibert. They have been at odds over a piece of land claimed for years by both. Until now he has dared make no attack, for Sibert is a prime favorite with the late King Richard," added Anselm gravely.

Giles's eyes shone. Not only was he about to enter castle-life as he had desired for as long as he could remember, but he was to see real warfare as well. Surely, in the troublous times to come, he would be given a chance to do deeds of valor. With boyish ignorance of the terrible side of warfare, of burned villages, and the horror of slow starvation, he delighted in the prospect of the excitement to come.

Anselm read his thoughts and shook his head sadly.

"You little realize the terrors of warfare," he said. "You have never seen your best friends, as I have, lying in their own blood. You have never seen the red glare of burning cottages against the sky."

Millicent shivered, and Giles was silent for a moment in deep thought.

"I will be a fighter," he said after a long pause. "I will go to war against the wrong. I will make

war on cruelty, but never, never will I do harm to anything smaller or weaker than I am."

"See!" exclaimed Millicent, pointing behind her. "They are bringing carts from the village to the castle."

"I think I know what they contain," replied Giles, with a backward glance at the great, clumsy, home-made carts that were slowly wending their way toward the castle. "Lord Sibert has sent out a call to the peasants to bring in their produce so that, in case of a siege, the castle will be well supplied with food. It seems rather hard on the poor people, who have to turn in everything they have raised."

Anselm shook his head. "It is better that the poor people should bring it to the castle," he said. "If worse comes to worst, they would lose the supplies to the enemy. Many of the villagers will take to the forest for protection, but most of them will seek protection in the castle."

The carts were near enough for them to see that they were filled with heaps of potatoes and bags of grain. In one were stacked up rude, wicker cages filled with poultry of various sorts. Cattle and sheep were tied to the backs of the wagons. The faces of the peasants who drove the carts were grim and troubled.

Anselm walked beside one raw-boned, young farmer, talking seriously. At first the peasant

seemed disinclined to do much talking. He seemed to feel suspicious of the knight who descended to walk along by his side, talking so freely. Usually, knights did not converse much with the commoners except to give them orders, but Anselm too long had lived the life of a common hermit to be fastidious. He had often told Giles that the true worth of a man was not to be measured by his position in the world or by his wealth.

Giles listened eagerly to the conversation about the food supply and armament. If he were to be a knight, he must know what preparation must be made in time of war.

"People are pretty well stirred up about it in the village," the man said. "We expect it to come soon."

Anselm turned to Giles.

"Can you tell why the villagers fear that the attack will be made soon?" he asked.

Giles looked doubtful for a moment, then he smiled. It was the smile of one who had thought out a difficult problem and had come to a satisfactory solution.

"How long would it take to overcome the castle by force?" he asked.

"It could not be taken in an attack," replied Anselm. "It would take a long siege."

"Then I know why the attack would be made

soon," exclaimed Giles. "The enemy would not want to wait until after the harvest. The more food there was on hand, the more time it would take to starve out the people in the castle."

Anselm looked fondly at the bright face beside him. Yes, in his estimation, Giles was well-fitted both in intelligence and bravery to stand with the sons of the nobility. He was thoughtful, brave, generous, and truthful. The man's quick glance of approval made the boy's heart leap.

The warder at the door of the castle had seen the approach of the train of carts and, as they came up to the moat, the huge drawbridge was slowly lowered. The men with the carts of provender were allowed to pass unquestioned, but the long pikes of two men-at-arms barred Anselm's way.

A curious smile passed over his face at the hindrance. He thought of the days when, as a boy, he had raced over that drawbridge with his brother and sister and the deference that was his due then. Now he was unrecognized. His sister had married Alford's brother against the wishes of her own older brother, Sibert, although it had been with the old father's consent. Anselm had chosen to cast his lot in with his sister. She would need him more than Sibert, and now, after more than a dozen years, he was coming back to his old home, only to be unrecognized.

He unfastened the sword with the plain hilt,

which had hung by his side from the time he had secured it from the chest at Avalon, and handed it to one of the guards.

"Take this sword to your master," he said. "He will recognize its workmanship, and will know from whom it came. Tell him that I come on matters of great importance."

The guard took the sword and looked at it intently. Somewhere he had heard a tale of a plain-hilted sword. It was one of the legends of the castle. His eyes looked up keenly as he saw the device scratched upon the blade. It was the sign of those whom he guarded.

A page came up to look at the newcomers curiously. His eyes flashed disdainfully as he saw their travel-stained rags. The guard called to the boy and handed him the sword.

"Take it to your father, lad," he said in the voice of one used to giving commands. "Tell him that a stranger would speak with him on a matter of importance."

The boy took the sword and, with another glance of contempt at Giles and Millicent, went into the courtyard behind the entrance.

"Is that Lord Sibert's son?" asked Anselm with a gesture toward the retreating page. "He has not the look of the rest of the family."

The man-at-arms looked after the lad contemptuously. "He is his son," he replied, "his

youngest one, and a spoiled, conceited fellow he is. He has just been recalled from another castle where he went as soon as he was old enough to be a page. There he was the youngest of all the pages and, being a pretty, little fellow, he was spoiled sadly. His father is perfectly disgusted with his training. The older lad is the model of all a young squire should be."

At this moment the empty carts came rattling across the courtyard and out over the drawbridge. More, laden with supplies, were approaching so the drawbridge was left lowered. Before they returned, unloaded, Gurth, the page, was back with a message from Sibert. His eyes were round with surprise and his voice, when he spoke, denoted a certain respectful attitude far different from the impudent glances he had formerly cast.

"My father bade me bring you to him, sir," he said, bowing before the tall figure of Anselm. A gleam of humor came into Giles's eyes at the sudden change from insolence to respect, and Gurth, in straightening, saw the look. Resentment at the mirth of a common peasant boy and insolence again came into his face. The look which he cast upon Giles held hatred.

Across the inner court they went, to the smaller building within. Neither Giles nor Millicent had ever seen the interior of such a castle. Avalon was one huge building, perched upon the sheer, rocky

summit of a high hill. Precipitous rocks and thick stone walls kept all its enemies at bay.

This castle seemed to be made up of several buildings, surrounded by a very thick wall. On top of the walls were built equally strong towers. These overlooked the moat which was dug around the castle. From them, the defenders of the castle could fling their missiles upon an approaching enemy. The moat was deep and wide. It would take an ambitious enemy either to attempt to tunnel under the walls or to fill them up, especially as it was an easy matter to fling down rocks upon them.

The size of the courtyard was surprising. In it were gardens and a well. Storehouses were on one side of the courtyard, and the dwelling-place of its owner on the other.

The hall, into which Gurth led them, was even larger than the one at Avalon. The walls were hung with finely wrought tapestry which not only made the place less gloomy, but also made it warmer in the winter. On it, in gay colors, were worked stories from the Bible, some of which were familiar to both of the children.

However, it was not the pictures on the tapestry which caught the attention the moment that they stepped into the room. As soon as their eyes had become used to the gloom within, after the dazzle of the day without, they looked at the one occupant

of the room. It was the knight they had seen at the inn.

"You are back," he said to Anselm. "I am glad, for I see that your quest has been successful."

Anselm drew Millicent forward.

"This is our little niece, Sibert," he said. "Millicent of Avalon." The tall, dignified man laid his hand upon her roughened curls, much to the astonishment of young Gurth who still lurked in the outskirts. His father noticed him.

"Go, son, to thy mother and tell her that Lady Millicent of Avalon has arrived, and is with me in the hall."

Again amusement flashed into Giles's eyes for he knew that it must be very galling to his young royal highness, as he had mentally dubbed Gurth, to run errands for strangers, especially strangers clad in rags and covered with dust. Again Gurth saw the glance of amusement, and his blood boiled at the thought of a common peasant making fun of him.

As soon as Gurth left the room, Sibert spoke kindly to Millicent and then turned back to Anselm. "My wife will take the little niece," he said. "She will do for her exactly as if she were her own. We saw these children a few weeks ago but we did not know that they were seeking us, nor did they know us."

He looked at Giles with so keen a glance that the boy felt that he had uncovered his most secret

thoughts. "Who is this lad?" he asked. Anselm hesitated the barest fraction of a minute.

"He is my friend," he said simply. "I have a great favor to ask of you. I want you to take the boy as one of your pages. He has been with me since babyhood. He has the characteristics of a faithful and brave knight."

"We do not make knights out of peasants, Anselm," said Sibert thoughtfully, again looking at Giles. What he saw was a pair of steady, gray eyes that looked fearlessly into his own, a firm chin that spoke eloquently of determination, and a crop of yellow curls worn in the peasant fashion. He noted the square set of the boy's shoulders and the well developed muscles of his legs and arms. Then his regard returned to the boy's face.

"The lad has well-cut features and does not bear himself as a common country lout," he mused.

Giles flushed. Anselm spoke dryly. "His education has been my one regard," he said.

"We will try it, at least," said Lord Sibert, with another penetrating glance.

The drapery that hung at the door was pushed aside and the Lady Constance entered. Both Giles and Millicent remembered the sweet-faced lady who had smiled so kindly at them at the inn. For the first time, Millicent was not sorry that she had come to the castle. Such a gentle, beautiful woman would be sure to be kind, even loving. It

would be good to have some woman to care for her again.

Lady Constance crossed the room and, much to her son's surprise and disgust, drew the ragged, dusty, little girl into her arms.

"My dear little girl," she said softly, "I knew your mother well and loved her. You are very like her."

Tears sprang into Millicent's eyes, but they were tears of joy. Giles looked on, a trifle enviously. He had never known his mother. She had died when he was a little baby. He did not even know who she was, but if he could have chosen a mother of all the women he had ever seen, without hesitation he would have chosen Lady Constance.

Lord Sibert drew the boy forward.

"I am taking a new page, Constance," he said gravely. Then he turned to Anselm.

"What is the lad's name?" he asked.

"His name is Giles," replied Anselm.

Lord Sibert turned to Giles.

"One of the duties of knighthood is gallantry, Giles," he said. "A page is supposed to wait upon the ladies of the castle, to serve them in all things. Lady Constance is your lady. You must watch out for her comfort and render her perfect obedience. You must learn the things which she will teach you. Down upon your knee, lad, in homage!"

For one fleeting second Giles's eyes rested upon

the tender, beautiful face of his liege lady. Reverently he went down on one knee and, with bowed head, kissed the hem of her robe; he, Giles the peasant, was henceforth dedicated to the service of Lord Sibert and Lady Constance. He was, at last, a page.

CHAPTER XVII

AGAINST ODDS

A LOOK of surprise came into Sibert's face at the courtly grace of the lad, and he cast a quick glance at Anselm. Surely a boy brought up in the wild would not have the graceful bearing of one who had been reared in castles. One could not have the polish and dignity of a page who had nearly reached the rank of squire, if he had not been under strict training. Why had Anselm taken this lad, a simple peasant, and lavished upon him the careful training that is the preparation for knighthood? Was it because he was lonely in his life upon the hillside and had taken the lad only for companionship, or was it because he really was some child of high degree?

“Take Giles to old Raoul, and bid him furnish him with the clothing of a page,” he told his son. Gurth started for the door, his face black with disdain. With a wistful glance at Anselm, for he was loath to go away with the haughty Gurth alone, Giles followed the page from the big hall to the open courtyard beyond. Across the yard they went in silence. Gurth felt that it was beneath his dignity to waste conversation on a common peasant,

and Giles's pride kept him from making any comment. Shag, who had lain down by the door, leaped up to greet his master and followed him across the square.

There were other dogs in the courtyard. Shag, who had been carefully trained while traveling with the troupe to leave all strange dogs alone, paid not the slightest attention to any of them. He kept close to his master's side, but with one wary eye directed toward a huge mastiff, who was advancing with signs of animosity. Giles laid one firm hand upon his pet's head. He was not afraid for him, because he had seen Shag victorious in battle with a larger dog than this mastiff, but he did not want his pet to get into trouble with any of Lord Sibert's dogs.

There were several other pages in the yard. When they saw the prospect of a fight, they crowded up to where Gurth and Giles were standing. Gurth saw a chance to revenge himself upon Giles for his mirth and also to have a little fun. He caught the castle dog by the leather strap about its neck.

"This is my dog," he told Giles.

"He looks like an ugly fellow," replied Giles.

"He *is* an ugly chap," replied Gurth with some pride. "He has chewed up two of the castle dogs since I brought him here a month ago. I like a good fighter."

Giles petted Shag's ugly head. The dog's tail wagged in response to the touch of his master's hand, but every muscle in his body was taut. His attention was all on the snarling, growling brute that was straining in his master's grasp.

"I like a dog with loyalty and affection better," said Giles. Gurth grimaced over his shoulder at the other pages who had come up.

"This is an awfully strong fellow," he panted. "I can't hold him much longer." Giles took stronger hold of Shag.

"I don't want them to fight," he said.

"Coward," said Gurth with scorn. "There, I said I could not hold him any longer. Let your dog look out for himself."

Giles let go his hold. He would only hinder Shag by keeping it for the mastiff was almost upon them, and bent on finishing poor Shag as quickly as possible. With a great impact the two dogs came together. There was a snarling growl from two throats, then a yelp of pain from the mastiff. He had expected little resistance and this game counter-attack surprised him. Both dogs were in splendid condition. Neither had ever been conquered in battle before.

Several squires and two of the men-at-arms, hearing the commotion, came hurrying up.

"The brown dog is a game fellow," said one squire to another. "He is at a disadvantage, for

the mastiff is fighting on his own ground. I wouldn't wager much on his chances, however."

Over and over the two dogs rolled. Neither seemed to be getting the better of the other. Blood smeared their bodies. Giles had never seen Shag fight as he was fighting now. The lust for battle was in his eyes. His teeth ripped at his antagonist, seeking for a grip upon the other's neck.

"Oh, stop them," he cried out in alarm, for Shag was very dear to his heart, and the other dog was very large and fierce.

"Let them fight it out," replied Gurth for, at that moment, his dog seemed to have all the advantage. "What is a peasant's dog to us, except to provide us fun?"

"I wouldn't be sorry to see the brown dog win," said the squire who stood by Giles's shoulder. "It was my dog that the mastiff killed last week."

Giles looked up at the speaker. There was no mistaking who he was, for he was the image of Lord Sibert cast in a narrower mold. Here was the lad who would later be Lord of Lichester Castle.

There was a shout from the group surrounding the dog-fight. The tables seemed to be turning. Shag no longer seemed at the disadvantage. He had gotten his hold upon the other dog's neck. Slowly, he was choking the very life out of him.

"Call off your dog!" shrieked Gurth. What

had seemed rare sport when his dog had seemed to be the winner, now was far from funny to the spoiled, young page. A howl of derision went up from the other boys.

"Did you call off your dog in the two fights he fought?" said his older brother in disgust.

There was no need to call off Shag. He had conquered his enemy. There was no point in killing a vanquished foe. Before the life was completely choked out of his adversary, Shag let his limp body go. With a humorous air of modesty and apology, as one who regretted a necessary deed, he went to his master's side and, with a long sigh, laid himself at his feet. The vanquished dog slunk off toward the kennels.

Giles dropped down on one knee and hugged the bleeding Shag. Then, without more than a glance at the furious Gurth, he led the dog to the well where, tearing a strip of cloth from his ragged tunic, he bathed the ugly wounds in the dog's side. Meanwhile, the other boys clustered about Gurth, eager to know who the peasant boy was, and why he had come to Lichester Castle.

The young squire, Sibert the second, came to where Giles was bathing his bloody pet, and seated himself on the edge of the well. Giles looked up and met his curious, and yet friendly, glance.

"That is a fine dog you have," said the squire, laying his hand upon Shag's head. "I don't sup-

pose you want to get rid of him, by any chance. I wouldn't mind owning that dog myself."

Giles drew the dog closer.

"He is my friend," said the boy simply. "One does not sell his friends."

"I don't blame you," said Sibert. "I wouldn't sell him if he were mine. You'd better watch out for my younger brother, though. He is accustomed to getting what he has set his heart upon. I can see that he has a strong feeling against you. He may try to take your dog away, to make up for his spoiling the mastiff. If he does, you tell him that I have spoken for him first."

"Thank you," said Giles. "You are kind."

"I like to see fair play," Sibert replied. "By the way, who are you?"

"I am Giles," replied the boy. "I came from Avalon with the Lady Millicent, your cousin. I am to be a page here at Lichester."

"From Avalon," exclaimed Sibert. "That is interesting. When my uncle came, several weeks ago, he told my father how he had given the little lady into the charge of a boy of twelve. I was in the room to hear it. My father said that the boy must have proven himself in all ways trustworthy, and my uncle said he would trust him with life itself. I will be your friend, Giles."

Giles looked up at him with grateful eyes. He was very happy that Anselm should trust him so

fully. Just then the door of the great hall opened, and Sibert and Anselm came into the courtyard.

"The boy is not to know, then?" questioned Lord Sibert.

"Not until he is fifteen," replied Anselm. "It was what I promised."

"It will make things harder for him," said Sibert thoughtfully, "but if he is the kind of a lad you think him to be, it will only make him the stronger in character."

When Lord Sibert found that his orders had not been carried out, his face darkened and he curtly called both Giles and Gurth.

"Why have you not carried out my orders?" he said to his son.

Gurth looked frightened. He had found out, in the short month he had been back at his father's castle, that, of all virtues, his father admired quick, accurate obedience most highly. His father was a stern taskmaster, unlike the easy-going, shiftless Lord Rupert from whom he had come. The thought of turning the blame onto Giles came into his mind.

"His dog nearly killed mine," he said sullenly. "I tried to make them stop fighting, but he would not call off his brute."

Giles looked at Gurth in open-mouthed surprise. He had been unwilling that Shag should fight. He had tried to prevent it but Gurth, so sure that

his dog would be victorious, had loosed his dog, knowing that if he did so there would be the fight. It was only after Gurth had seen that things were going against his pet, that he had told Giles to call off Shag.

Lord Sibert saw the astonished glance but seemingly paid no heed to it.

"Is that the truth?" he asked Giles sternly.

Giles hesitated. It was the truth. He could not deny that, but it was not the whole truth. It was the truth, but a truth that made a lie seem like truth. Giles could not express that, so he merely replied, "Yes, sir." Lord Sibert looked at him keenly.

"Did you set your dog on my son's dog?" he asked.

"No, sir," replied Giles, and this time his answer was prompt and decided enough.

"Did he set his dog on yours?"

"No, sir," replied Giles.

"His dog is a very ugly beast, Father," broke in Gurth. "You ought to have seen how he chewed up Roi. He won't be any good to any one any more. The brute should be killed. He is dangerous to have around. He might hurt some one badly."

At that moment Shag left Giles's side and bounded toward the open door of the hall. The Lady Millicent, beautifully attired, as beffited a

little lady of a castle, stood there with the Lady Constance by her side. The moment she saw Shag she opened her arms to him to his evident delight. He made a great pretense of chewing up her slipper, rolled over on his back, puppy-fashion, and kissed her hand. Then he poked his head into the Lady Constance's hand, trying to tell her that he liked her very much.

Lord Sibert laughed shortly.

"That does not look very ferocious to me," he said, "but there, I'm not a man to be frightened at trifles. Next time, my son, call off your dog before he is chewed up, and now go to old Raoul as I bade thee some time ago, and tell him what I told thee."

Stung by the implied charge of cowardice, and humbled before the other pages, Gurth walked off with Giles, Shag following him. Outwardly obedient, but with hot rebellion in his heart, he led Giles to Raoul and delivered his father's message. Then, not desiring to add to his humiliation by staying in Giles's presence longer, he sought out certain of his friends among the pages to entertain them with his views concerning the allowing of peasants to train with the children of nobles for knighthood.

Meanwhile Giles was undergoing a new experience, that of being fitted to a new suit of clothing throughout. It was wonderful to discard the sim-

ple tunic of peasant and to take on that of a page. It was not the new clothes themselves that filled his heart with joy. It was what the new clothes stood for, that thrilled him. He was no longer Giles the peasant boy, but Giles the page. And there in the dimly-lighted room, where the old servant of Lord Sibert bent over the small alteration he must make in the new garb, Giles again made up his mind that in all ways he would grow up worthy of the great honor that had been done him. He vowed that he would set his mind upon learning all that he could which a knight should know. "I will grow strong, gentle, and wise," he thought.

The fact that he had won Gurth's dislike troubled him, although he did not see how he could have acted otherwise. He was pledged to give service to all of Lord Sibert's family, but how could he be of service to one who hated him?

Giles had a quick, hasty temper, although he had it under good control. He had been very angry with Gurth, both for the trouble over the dogs and the statements that the young page had made to his father, but Giles was not one to hold a grudge. Already his anger was nearly burned out. Not so with Gurth. Fed upon bitter thoughts and plans for revenge, his antagonism grew to hatred that was destined to bring both boys into grave danger.

CHAPTER XVIII

TRAINING FOR KNIGHTHOOD

To Giles's great delight his training commenced that very day. The big meal of the day was served in the late afternoon. In spite of the fact that the sun had not yet set, the great hall was dark. The great hall of Lichester was like most other great halls of the time, a citadel within a citadel. It was here that the last stand was made in case an enemy won past the outer wall. The windows were narrow slits, high up in the walls.

During the afternoon meal the great hall was lighted by torches. Some of these stood in metal holders, but it was usually the duty of the pages to hold them so the light would fall most advantageously for the diners. To Giles's joy he was assigned to the torch nearest the big table, about which sat the lord of the castle and the most exalted of his knights.

Not far away sat the ladies of the castle. The light from the torches fell upon their bright-colored gowns and glinted upon the long, dark hair of the Lady Constance. A metal coronet held it back from her face while, beneath the coronet, it hung in glossy waves below her waist. Lady Millicent was among the younger girls of the castle.

That she had lost her dread, Giles could tell by the happy expression of her face as she talked and laughed with her companions.

There were rushes spread on the floor and the room was almost barn-like in its simplicity, but to Giles it was the most wonderful room he had ever been in. The dogs of the castle hung about their masters, begging for the bones of the feast that were always thrown out to them. Shag, eyes bright with interest, lay by Giles's side most of the time, only going twice to Anselm for bones.

What was a tiresome matter of duty to the other torch-bearers, was a wonderful experience to the boy who had longed and dreamed for years of just such duty. Whereas the others yawned with impatience at the length of the feast, Giles stood with alert, eager face watching the gay scene before him. He stood so near to Lord Sibert that he could hear the conversation that passed about the table. It was not about the chase or the pleasures in which knights delight. There were no stories of gallant deeds nor jugglers with the funny tricks of which Millicent had spoken. The pleasures were for times of peace, and now war was brewing. The conversation dealt with the best ways to fortify a castle, the amount of food that would be needed in case the siege were to be a long one, and the preparation which must still be made.

The days that followed were fascinating ones

to the boy. Much of his time, it is true, was spent with the ladies of the castle, as was the case with all of the other pages. He ran errands for the Lady Constance and learned the things that she taught him with a good grace, although he was far happier when out in the courtyard with the knights and squires. He was almost old enough to be a squire but, until he had learned many things that a page was supposed to know, he could not hope to be promoted to that rank.

"Work hard, lad," said Anselm. "You will catch up to the others if you do. They have never felt the deep desire and the working under difficulties that you have. Your very determination will carry you through."

Giles did work desperately. Whatever game they played or race or contest that they took part in, he threw himself into with a vim that soon awoke the respect of the other boys. He did not win much at first, to his great chagrin. The other boys had practised for several years while he was entirely new at the games, but every day he could see some improvement.

His desire to become friendly with Gurth was not seconded by that young gentleman, who surely could hold a grudge for a long time. After one or two attempts to be pleasant to the younger son of Lord Sibert he gave it up and, in the future, ignored him as completely as if he were not about.

This was difficult at times, for Gurth went out of his way to be disagreeable to the boy who had angered him so greatly. Giles would have often suffered from Gurth's dislike if it had not been for young Sibert, the squire. With an older boy's good-natured liking for a plucky younger one, he often showed his approval in a way that influenced the other pages in Giles's favor.

His education in horsemanship began soon after he came to Lichester. Riding a horse had looked very easy to him when he had seen the knights go riding away from Avalon, but he found that it was not as easy as it seemed. The horse that he was given was as capricious and full of small tricks as a horse might be.

One moment Giles was sitting erect upon the saddle, the next he was flying over the horse's head amid a roar of laughter from the onlookers. But he did not give up. Although he had landed rather heavily on his shoulder which pained badly, he got up with a twisted smile to try again. The horse stood quietly enough until he was fairly seated then sprang off all four legs, landing with a jarring bump. This, not having dislodged his rider, he reared upon his hind legs. Giles clung to the saddle. The horse broke into a fast run, only to stop so suddenly that again Giles went flying over his head.

"Well, I never saw that horse act like that be-

fore," said young Sibert, catching the animal by the bridle. "Something must be the matter with him."

A search brought to light a small, sharp bit of rock inserted under the saddle. The saddle was firmly strapped on so the presence of the sharp fragment of stone must have been painful, even before Giles's weight was in the saddle. With a scornful and withering glance at his younger brother, Sibert flung the bit of stone at his ankle. Being adept in the art of throwing stones, the missile hit Gurth's ankle and hurt. Gurth, who admired his older brother more than any other human being, was hurt more by the look of scorn than the stone and was filled with jealousy.

Giles, now that the horse was made comfortable, no longer had difficulty with him. He practised as much as possible for the next two weeks in the courtyard, anxious to become sufficiently proficient to accompany the ladies when they went falconing.

It was not often that the ladies of the castle were allowed to ride from the castle, however. Even when the great drawbridge was lowered for them to leave the castle for pleasure, an armed guard went with them. The young squires were not considered enough of a protection in these troublous times.

Every day there were new arrivals at the castle. More loads of food were brought from surround-

ing farms and villages. The village that lay nearest the dangerous border line between the two duchies was completely deserted. The people who usually made their homes there fled into the forest, or sought refuge from the foe with friends and relatives nearer to Lichester.

Lord Sibert's spies, who were keeping watch over the enemy, reported that Lord Gillies was calling together his men-at-arms and was preparing for an invasion. They reported that great plans were being laid for the capture of the castle, and that Lord Gillies was well-equipped with both men and ammunition.

A small group of Lord Sibert's men captured a messenger who was on his way from Lord Gillies to King John. By threatening torture, they frightened him into telling that Lord Gillies was offering John his help in his attack on Lichester, and that Lord Gillies's preparations were almost complete.

All of the pages were very much interested in the preparation for war and quite burned to do something heroic. Most of their spare time was spent either listening to their elders or playing war.

In these encounters, Gurth, being the son of the Lord of Lichester, insisted upon playing that he was his father, the defender. None of the pages wanted to take the part of the invaders at first. At last Giles spoke up hotly.

“We aren't having a bit of fun,” he said. “It

is all because we all want to be the heroes of the scrap. I hate Lord Gillies and I'd fight against him to the best of my ability if I got a chance, but I'll play I am he rather than not play at all. And if I do play I'm he, watch out for your laurels, Gurth of Lichester."

The quick retort on Gurth's lips was checked by the lord of the castle himself who was within earshot.

"Bravo, Giles of Avalon," he called out. "Make that young son of mine work to uphold the honor of Lichester."

That put a different face on the matter. If Lord Sibert approved of those who were willing to take the part of the enemy, there was not a boy who was unwilling to do it. Most of the boys, even those who had looked down at Giles when he had first come among them in his tattered peasant garb, now admired him for the whole-hearted way he flung himself into both work and play. He was a born leader, and as such they recognized him. His sunny disposition and obliging manner had already won friends for him.

Gurth envied him this popularity. His own pride and desire to have his own way at all costs were not characteristics to make him well-liked among the other pages. It was not entirely his fault, however. He had been badly spoiled at the other castle by both knights and ladies. It had

given him exaggerated notions of his own importance. Some day his eyes would be open to his own disagreeable traits, but the time was not yet ripe.

"Choose your sides," proposed Lord Sibert, who was interested in all boys' sports.

That did not quite please Gurth, who had planned to make a sweeping choice of all of the strongest players. However, as his father had been the one to suggest it, he gave up as gracefully as he could. Fortune favored him in the matter of first choice. Without hesitation he called out, "Anstruther."

A quiet look of amusement flicked over Giles's face as the big fellow slouched over to Gurth's side, for he knew that, while Anstruther was as strong as an ox, he was as clumsy as one, as well. Giles glanced quickly over the group of pages.

"I'll take Roger," he said quietly.

A howl of laughter greeted this, for, of all the pages, Roger was the smallest in body and the weakest in endurance. He could not run as fast as the others. There was not a page among them who could not best him in a wrestling match. Roger, himself, looked at Giles in amazed disbelief. It was the first time since he had come to the castle several years before that he had ever been chosen first in any game. He looked at Giles with almost pathetic gratitude.

Lord Sibert, still looking on, turned to his older son.

"Peasant though he may be, the boy is wise," he said.

"But Father," he exclaimed, "Roger is no good in a fight. He is as weak as water. Think of him pitted in a fisticuff against Anstruther."

"He will be pitted in no fisticuff," replied Lord Sibert. "Giles is too wise for that. The actual battle is but a small part of a campaign. It is the ability to plan that counts. Any country lout can develop strong muscles, but it takes a far-seeing brain to carry through a siege. Roger may never fight in a single battle, but I would rather have him my friend than my foe thirty years from now."

The other boys were fairly well matched up. It did not take long to choose up. The boys who were Gurth's particular friends were not especially admired by Giles. Both boys were well satisfied with the result. It was necessary that they collect ammunition and make armor for themselves.

"I suppose, as we are the enemy, we ought to let them win," said one of the boys on Giles's side.

"Never," replied Giles firmly.

"Then, as we are going to win we ought not to call ourselves Lord Gillies's men," said Roger firmly. "Let's call our leader Sir Giles of something or other, and send a challenge to them in his name."

Giles's eyes shone. He drew from the blouse of his tunic the coat of arms he had made up in the cave at Avalon on the eventful day that saw the beginning of all his adventures. Anselm had painted a beautiful copy of it on parchment. Before their admiring eyes it gleamed—gold, blue, and crimson.

"It is only a made-up one," confessed Giles. "You all have coats of arms that belonged to your fathers and grandfathers. Mine is a new one. It helps me, though."

"I know," exclaimed Roger. "We will call ourselves Knights of the Star. Giles is Sir Giles of the Star, and the rest of us are knights. We'll send a challenge under the flag of truce."

After some discussion as to the wording of the challenge Roger, carrying the protecting banner of white, crossed the courtyard to the other side of the court where Gurth and the others of his side were building their fort. With much ceremony, one of Gurth's knights conducted him to the leader. Roger slipped his hunting gauntlet from his hand. "In the name of Sir Giles of the Star I throw down the gauntlet, declaring war upon Sir Gurth of Lichester." At the last word, he hurled the gauntlet at Gurth's feet.

The challenge was instantly accepted. Gurth slung the gauntlet back with all the strength in his good right arm. The fight was on.

CHAPTER XIX

THE BATTLE

FOR some time both sides were occupied in making fortifications. Gurth had promptly taken the best site and soon had his men busy making a castle. Much firewood, cut into the long lengths suitable for large fireplaces, had been brought from the forest to the castle, and it was from the piles of this that both sides got their material.

"I do not think much of the place where our castle is," exclaimed Roger, with much dissatisfaction. "Their site is much the better. Gurth always takes the best of everything."

"We'll have to put up with it," replied Giles, as he lifted a big log into place. "At least we can make a castle that will fill them with envy."

The castle building for some time went on in silence, as far as Roger was concerned. From time to time he gazed longingly at the more favorable site of the enemy's castle. It was quite evident to him that Gurth was doing justice to his excellent position by building a fine castle. "I should very much like that castle and that position," he thought.

The sun was very hot and it beat down unmercifully.

fully on their heads, for there was no shade upon that side of the courtyard. Giles saw that he and his men were getting both hot and tired, and that the castle was not nearly finished. Knowing that they would stand a small chance of success if all were exhausted, he called most of them off, leaving only one to continue work. Across the court they could see all of Gurth's men working briskly, and apparently comfortable for they were in the shade.

"They are getting much more done than we are," complained one of the boys. "They will be ready for the attack long before we are ready for them."

"They will be all tired out," replied Giles.

"I don't think much of our site," said Roger gloomily. The others laughed.

"What are you going to do about it?" asked the one who had complained because more work was not being done.

Roger said nothing but his eyes narrowed. Giles, watching him, felt that although he had stopped talking of the matter he had not stopped thinking of it. He was about to ask whether Roger thought it wise to move their castle to another place when a cheer from the other side brought them all to their feet to see what was going on there. It was quite evident that Gurth felt that his castle was finished and was celebrating that fact by putting his men through military exercises in front of it.

"Yes," said Roger pensively, "I would like that castle."

"Why don't you take the flag of truce and go over to Gurth and say to him, 'Gurth, we like your castle and we don't like ours. Will you please kindly exchange castles with us,'" teased one of the boys. Roger flushed, but he was used to being teased morning, noon, and night, so he did not retort. However, he whispered to Giles that it would be wiser to leave their castle unfinished than to finish it properly.

"Just fix it in front so it will look done," he finished up and, because Giles had great faith in his friend's wisdom and felt sure that he would not suggest such a thing without a very good reason, he followed his advice.

Shortly after this conference the fight began in earnest. Gurth sent two of his men out into the field against Giles. These men were met by two of Giles's men, who promptly drove them as far back toward Gurth's castle as they dared to go. Roger's parting advice had been, "Don't let them lure you too close to their castle." Knowing this to be good advice, they took care to follow it.

For a long time the fight went on, neither side gaining any advantage. Both were fighting warily, and both were very well matched. On each side the players worked so well together that not so much as a prisoner was taken. At last, both

sides were tired out and, by common consent, re-tired to their castles to rest. Hot and tired as they were, the enemy's shade was most tantalizing to Giles's men. It was particularly annoying for the well was near Gurth's castle, and several of his knights were taking copious drinks of the cool water. To emphasize the fact that they had all the water they needed and that Giles had none, they drank much more than was really good for them. Then they poured out what was left in the pail upon the ground. It was maddening to Giles and Roger to see this wicked waste of the water that they would have given much to have.

Gurth fully appreciated the situation and rejoiced, for he knew that no sane person in Giles's castle would venture to go to the well, and that seeing the water would be exquisite torture. There were jeers of derision from Gurth's side as the brimming bucket was again drawn from the well. The boys could almost see the longing, parched lips of those on Giles's side.

"I'd give 'most anything for a drink," said one of Giles's men.

"I'd like to get it in spite of them," replied Giles thoughtfully. "They think themselves very clever to torment us in this way. Hello, what are they up to now?"

Gurth had taken the pail of water and was advancing toward them.

"It is a trick," whispered Roger. "Don't pay any heed to him." But it was too late. One of the boys, who had more faith in Gurth's kindness of heart, was already on his way to get it. Just as he was about to reach his hand out for the pail, Gurth raised it and, with all his force, flung the water in the boy's face. With a howl of rage at the trick that Gurth had played him, John rushed forth, determined to revenge himself upon his tormentor. Gurth retreated toward his own castle followed by John, in spite of Giles's command for him to return. The result was inevitable. Several of Gurth's friends ran out and, before John saw his danger, he was surrounded, thrown to the ground, bound, and carried away in triumph to the enemy's castle, amid the cheers of his captors.

"What a foolish thing to try!" commented Roger. "He deserves to be left to his fate but I suppose it is our duty to rescue him, for I don't think much of being only seven to their eight. Isn't it about time for us to take their castle, Giles? I'm getting rather thirsty."

"Do you think we could?" replied Giles doubtfully, while the other boys hooted derisively at him.

"Well," replied Roger, "we can try. Besides, I have an idea. Look what they are doing now! They think that they can catch another one of our men with their old water."

Gurth had again filled the pail with water and had placed it by the well. After doing that, he ostentatiously withdrew to his castle and gathered his knights about him.

"What is your plan, Roger?" asked Giles. "I'll admit that I'd do 'most anything for a drink, but if we did go to the well we would be captured unless we took all of our men and, if we took them all, we would lose our castle."

"Would you mind losing it?" asked Roger, "that is, would you mind if we could get theirs?"

"No," answered Giles firmly. "It's only half-finished, anyway."

"Then exchange castles," said Roger, playfully.

Leaving one of their number to guard the fort, the others gathered close about Roger while he told his plan. At first all except Giles were doubtful whether it could succeed.

"If it doesn't, you are done for," protested Rolf. "They would rather capture you, Giles, than any of the rest of us, and if Gurth gets you, he will make it pretty uncomfortable for you. The rest of us wouldn't stand a chance in the world with you gone. It is too risky."

"If we could do it, it would be the biggest thing possible," argued Roger. "All it needs is quick action at the right time."

"I'm in favor of it," said Giles. "We are going to do it, and we are going to do it right. As

you say, they would give more for getting me into their hands than for anything else so, when they see a chance to do it, they will take it in a hurry. You do not need to fear for me, for I know what is at stake and am prepared for what they will think is a surprise to me. The whole success of the undertaking lies in your understanding what to do, and doing it at the right time. There are seven of us. With each of you doing what you are told, that ought to be enough. I will go for the water as secretly as I can seemingly, but really taking pains to let them see me. Just as I am about to make off with it they will come out after me, at least several of them will. That will take down their number to about five. When you fellows see them chasing me, come out after the ones that are after me. Every single one of you leave our fort, and come after those who are chasing me. I will take care to lead them away from our castle toward theirs, yet off to one side. They will see that our castle is left entirely unguarded and will send three or four boys to capture it. We'll let them for we don't want the old thing anyway, but as soon as they are well on their way to this castle Roger will give the sign from some hiding-place, which means that all of you will stop chasing the boys that are after me and will run as fast as you can to their castle. You will overpower their guard, untie John, and hold the castle until I get back to it. If I am in a very

tight place one of you may come to help me. Do you understand?"

To make sure that they really did understand the plan thoroughly Giles made each boy tell him his own part in the undertaking. The more they considered the plan the more sensible and possible it appeared to them, and the more eager they were to try it out. Boys who had rather looked down upon Roger and who had scoffed at his desire to drive the enemy from their well-fortified castle, looked at the slight, little figure with new respect, as if the idea that Roger was a force to consider was a new one. The plan was told to the sentinel and preparations for carrying it out were put into motion.

Several of the boys began to pile empty chicken-crates, which were waiting to be carried to the village, in a straight line from the castle toward the well. They were unnecessarily noisy about this, for they wished to direct the enemy's attention away from what was happening at the other end of their castle. This was not strictly necessary, however, for the slope of the land hid the small figure that, flat upon his stomach, was wriggling his way from the castle to a good-sized clump of bushes at some distance to the right of it. By the time that the barricade of chicken-coops extended as far as the limited number of them would reach, Roger was safely stowed away among the bushes, having

managed to reach this retreat unseen by the enemy.

Meanwhile, Giles was being quite conspicuous. He put on insufferable airs. From one of the other pages he borrowed a brilliant red feather which, in plain sight of Gurth and his men, he fastened to his little cap. The feather had a jaunty air all its own and Giles was visibly pleased with it. He fairly strutted; then he disappeared into the castle.

A few minutes later one of Gurth's men clutched at his sleeve and pointed excitedly toward the row of chicken-coops on the other side of the courtyard. The tip of a bright red feather was visible for a moment, then disappeared only to reappear again in a few minutes, this time farther away from the castle and nearer to the tempting well. It was quite evident to Gurth that it was his arch enemy, Giles himself, who, in the most secret manner possible, was trying to steal away the precious pail of water. This was much greater luck than Gurth had expected as a result of his plan, and he quite quivered with excitement at the prospect of capturing Giles. To capture Giles would raise him in the regard of the others.

"We'll get him this time," he said exultantly, "and when I do ——" He did not finish his sentence for, evidently, what he intended to do with Giles could not be put into words. It would take serious contemplation. Perhaps he would tie him

up and drag him around to show to all the knights and squires. Gurth thought that his cup of happiness would be filled if he could tie Giles to a tree, capture his castle, and then show his brother, Sibert, how extremely clever he was.

Meanwhile, the red feather still flaunted itself over the top of the chicken-coops and every moment it drew nearer to the gooseberry-bushes that grew not far from the well. In front of the well was the pail of water.

"We will let him get nearly to the pail before we go after him," whispered Gurth. "It will seem all the worse if he nearly gets what he is after. Paul and Cedric and I will go after him. Plan to cut him off from the rest of the enemy. We must capture him."

Meanwhile Giles, taking the utmost care to seem to be trying to keep out of sight, warily drew nearer to the well. Roger, trembling with excitement in the clump of bushes to the right, kept eager watch for the proper moment for his signal and the other boys, tense with interest and quivering with zeal to be up and doing, crouched behind their poorly-made castle, waiting for the moment to rush out.

Giles reached the gooseberry-bushes. A short, quick dash for the well lay before him but, for a moment, he hesitated. A hasty glance behind him showed that his men were ready and that Roger

was safely in hiding, then, rising swiftly to his feet, he sped for the well. He did not reach it, for Gurth and his followers rushed to intercept him. Giving a wild yell, which was the signal decided upon to call forth his knights, he ran straight across the courtyard. Out rushed his knights to his rescue. For a moment or two none of Gurth's men, whom he had left to guard the castle, realized that Giles's castle was left unguarded. It was John, the prisoner, who called their attention to the fact, unwittingly doing his side a good turn, although unintentionally. He was by far the most stupid of Giles's men. That was why he was so easily captured, but he was a jolly, pleasant fellow so it was impossible not to like him. He had been the last to be chosen, because of this stupidity.

Seeing that his castle was entirely unguarded, he yelled, "Back, you fools, the enemy will get your castle."

"Why, so we can," exclaimed one of Gurth's guards. "Come on, fellows. William and James stay here on guard and the rest come with me!"

Again John shrieked a warning, and would have continued shrieking had not William gagged him. Straight across the field Gurth's men ran, paying no attention to the race Giles was leading Gurth and his two followers, for they were intent only on the capture of Giles's castle, but there was one, a small boy in hiding, who was keeping close track



THEN, RISING SWIFTLY TO HIS FEET, HE SPED FOR THE WELL.
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of all participants in the fight. As soon as the three enemies had come within ten feet of the Castle of the Star, Roger gave his signal, two loud, ringing calls.

To a man, the forces of the Star wheeled about and started on the run for Gurth's castle. The dazed enemy did not, at first, realize what this change in course meant. They gazed blankly from the deserted Giles, still followed by three of their men, to the rest of Giles's army, running away from him. A shout, a cry for help from their own men who had been left to guard the castle, warned them of what it all meant, but it was too late to go to their rescue. Five to two, they were shortly overcome. John was unbound, and the very cords that had been tied about him were used to bind the two who had been left to guard him.

Meanwhile, what of Giles? He was by far the fastest runner of all the pages, with one exception. That was Gurth himself, and it was Gurth, with two to help him, who was after Giles. The shouting of his own men, and the cheering of the opposing side told Gurth how the battle had been going behind him. He readily saw that his whole hope lay in capturing Giles, for with their leader a prisoner his men would be forced to come to terms.

"We've got to capture him, lads," he shouted hoarsely to his men. "We are lost if we do not. They will give anything to regain their leader."

"We'll get him," called Cedric reassuringly.
"We are three to one."

A quick backward glance showed Giles that the enemy was between him and his own men, and that his men had been successful in capturing the other better castle, even if they had lost their own in so doing. A forward glance showed him that if he did not change his plan and swerve toward another direction, he would be trapped. His backward glance had also shown that Gurth's men were somewhat separated and that several of the real grown-up knights, among them Lord Sibert, were watching the game. Changing his course abruptly, he came running at top speed toward his followers. Choosing the one enemy he considered weakest, he charged straight at him with lowered head. Much as a goat would attack his enemy he came. The boy spread out his arms to stop him, but it was just about as easy to try to stop the oncoming rush of a bull. Giles's head struck his adversary in the pit of the stomach, causing that young gentleman to double up like a modern jack-knife and sit down hard. That put him out of the race for he didn't get his breath for several minutes, but there were two left, running rather closely together and still between him and safety.

By this time Giles's men had the enemy's castle in their hands and had neatly trussed up the two guards. A warning shout from Roger, who still

was keeping thorough watch on all sides of the affair, called their attention to the plight that Giles was in. Anxious to wipe away the disgrace of his capture, John ran to the rescue. Leaving Gurth to Giles, John attacked Paul and, having had a chance to rest while a prisoner, he soon overcame him and dragged him back to the castle.

Giles no longer ran from Gurth. Instead, he came to meet him and, at last, Gurth of Lichester and Giles of the Star stood face to face at the beginning of their trial for supremacy. The fight that ensued was long talked of among the pages. There were often fights among the boys, for it was an age of fighting, and the boy who could not hold his own among the other boys was considered a weakling and treated with contempt. But such a fight as this was different. Gurth had never been downed in any fight with a boy his own age and build. Neither had Giles. Gurth had come out victor in many encounters with the other boys. Giles had seldom fought with other boys, but he and Anselm had had many a friendly tussle together. Both boys were fully determined to win, and the struggle was glorious to them.

There was no interference from any of the other boys, for that was against the rules of the game. Over and over, up and down! Clothing was torn into ribbons. At last Giles's outdoor life and the strength that such life gives, began to tell. Gurth's

breathing became short and quick; his endurance was weakening. As if he realized this, Giles put forth every ounce of his strength and his enemy fell. Giles had won! Panting and slightly dizzy after the exertion, he rose amid the cheers of his men and handed over his prisoner to John who, having taken his own prisoner to the castle, had returned to the place of battle.

Without a shadow of a doubt, the Knights of the Star had won. Only three of the enemy remained uncaptured, big Anstruther among them. The fight was over but this account would not be complete without one added detail. When Roger gave his last warning Anstruther noted the place where he was hidden. In the fury of the ensuing fight he forgot all about Roger, till Gurth was finally made prisoner. Then, knowing his own time was about to come and anxious to do one more deed of valor before that time came, he ran out to capture Roger.

Roger, seeing him coming, fled, but what chance did he have against the long legs and tireless strength of the big fellow? As Anstruther was about to seize his small victim, Roger ducked under his arm, at the same time extending a leg over which Anstruther promptly fell. Roger at once fell upon him, calling loudly for assistance, whereupon the big fellow scrambled to his feet, with Roger clinging to his back like a burr.

"I've got him! I've got him!" he shrieked at the top of his lungs. Unable to shake the little fellow off and dizzy from his fall, Anstruther staggered toward the fort he had helped to build forgetting, for a moment, that it was in the hands of his enemy. By the time his wits came back to him, he was surrounded and tied up with the other prisoners, to the huge delight of all the pages.

. It was a very long time before big Anstruther was allowed to forget that he, the strong and mighty, had been captured by Roger, the weak and small. That day marked a great change in the attitude of all the boys toward Roger, for the news spread that the brilliant plan, the following of which had resulted in success for Giles and his men, had been suggested by the little fellow they had all despised as a weakling. Roger and Giles became the closest of friends, but, as for Gurth, his heart was sore and bitter.

CHAPTER XX

GURTH GETS THE UPPER HAND

SEVERAL days after the mock battle, Gurth, on his way to the big hall with a message to his father, arrived just in time to hear Giles's name spoken. Seeing that his father was talking with one of the older men about the castle he stopped at the door rather than interrupt. Gurth had been hating Giles very cordially since the day of his own defeat, so the words of praise upon his father's lips for his enemy were very bitter to the high-spirited boy.

"That boy has pluck," his father was saying. "It was only boy's play, but the lad showed his worth for all of that."

Gurth quite writhed at the memory of his own defeat. To be outwitted was bad enough, but to be tied up by a peasant boy was a great deal worse. Gurth was quite sure that he would never be able to live down this disgrace.

He had not intended to listen to affairs not meant for his ears. His mind was brooding on the insult to which his dignity had been exposed. As he stood there, two or three bits of the conversation came to his ears. One was about the mys-

terious uncle concerning whose bravery there were so many tales. To Gurth the uncle, who had been considered dead for twelve long years only to come back very much alive, was something of a hero. Had he not been a wonderful fighter? Even now he was absent on a most difficult and dangerous errand.

"Anselm wants me to give his boy a chance to show his worth," Lord Sibert was saying. "I had planned to send my son on this mission, but have changed my mind. He is too hot-headed and heedless. Job needs a thoughtful boy with him, one that will follow out directions exactly as they are given. Tell him to report to Job, and take orders from him!"

"Do you intend to send another page with him?" asked old Ralph.

"Yes, there are others that can show him the way," replied Lord Sibert. "Yet it is to Giles that I want the command to be given. I cannot stop to give the order myself, for I must ride to Lichester Town. I'll leave it in your hands. Let the boy choose his own companion, if you think fit."

"He will probably choose Roger," replied old Ralph with a shake of his head. "The two are the best of friends, but Roger scarcely seems strong enough. I would suggest another."

"I'll leave it to you," replied Sibert rising suddenly. "I must depart at once."

Gurth's heart was heavy. His father had left the hall by another door, but the boy did not follow him. He had forgotten the fact that one of his father's spies had just reached the castle and had asked to be reported to Lord Sibert. All he could think of was the fact that Giles was being honored and he, the son of Sibert himself, disgraced. His father was giving the mission intended for him to another, and that other his enemy. He thought how wonderful it would have been if he was sent on the important errand with Giles, sent as his servant, to wait upon him. He was sitting on the doorstep engaged in this flight of imagination when Ralph came to the door.

"Ho, Gurth!" he exclaimed. "Can you tell me where I may find Giles of the Star?" Gurth flushed deeply, for since the mock battle both pages and men-at-arms had called the peasant boy of Avalon, Giles of the Star. The title made Gurth furious, whenever he heard it.

"Don't talk to me of Giles, the peasant boy," he said angrily. "I will hold no conversation with him. If you would speak with him, you will find him in the smithy."

Ralph's eyes narrowed. Like most of the men of Lichester, he disliked the haughty ways and insolence of Lord Sibert's youngest son. A gleam came into his eyes as he thought of a scheme which he felt sure would humble Gurth to the very dust.

He would send Gurth as Giles's companion, and give him orders to obey his enemy in all things. The idea so pleased the old man that he chuckled aloud.

"Your father will send Giles as a messenger from him to Job, the spy," he said softly, "and you," he paused, "are to go with him as his companion and servant."

The color flamed up into Gurth's face and his hands clenched by his side. He was furious and hot words of refusal sprang to his lips.

"I won't," he cried, "I won't, won't, *won't!*"

Old Ralph caught the boy by the arm and shook him as hard as he could. It was the duty of a page to obey all people in authority.

"You will do as I say," he said, giving the boy's arm a jerk.

"I won't," cried Gurth as before. Ralph struck him heavily across the mouth.

"I can drag you to young Giles and make you tell him under the lash," he said dryly. "You are going with him and under his orders. You are going to him now, telling him to come to me for orders. Return with him. If you do not obey me, you shall be lashed by the whip before all of the other pages."

Ralph's words were as good as law. On thinking it over, Gurth decided that it would be better to obey than to face consequences. Very slowly

he started toward the smithy where he knew Giles was. As he turned away, Ralph called after him.

"Tell him to report to me at the close of the meal," he said.

Very slowly indeed Gurth made his way to the place where he had last seen his enemy. His heart was heavy as he started, and he was furiously angry. Never would he take orders from a peasant. A tiny smile came to his face. He saw a way out of the difficulty.

As soon as he saw old Ralph had returned to the hall he put to his heels and was soon inside the smithy, where he found Giles deeply absorbed in a story the smith was telling about Anselm and the plain-hilted sword.

"Perfectly plain I made the hilt," he was saying, "but it was at his bidding. 'When I have deserved to have it decorated I will come to you but, until I have done some deed of valor, I will carry a plain sword,' he told me. When he came to the castle several weeks ago I spoke with him on the matter and asked if the time was not yet ripe for his sword to bear the stamp of his nobility but he refused, saying sadly, 'Not yet, friend, for my work is not yet finished.' "

"Giles," broke in Gurth's voice from the doorway, "I have a message for you from my father. Come out here that I may give it to you in private."

Giles followed Gurth outside. As soon as they were at some distance from the smithy his guide leaned toward him and whispered, "My father is sending me on an important mission, and you are to go with me as my servant. He is sending you because you are a peasant and should learn to wait upon the nobility."

Giles set his teeth together firmly to hold back the hot words which seethed in his heart. Of all distasteful tasks that could be devised by man, this, to serve one whom he both disliked and in a measure scorned, was perhaps the most bitter. However disagreeable the task might be, if Lord Sibert had given the command, it was a part of his training in knighthood to obey, and to obey cheerfully. Knights were often called upon to do hard tasks.

"When are we going to start?" he asked shortly.

"Now," replied Gurth with an apprehensive glance over his shoulder. The sooner they left Lichester the better for his plan, for it was nearly time for the meal after which old Ralph was to put Giles in command. "We have got to start now and travel in secret as quickly as possible. Go to the castle and change your clothing for your peasant smock. Then put on your cape, that your clothing may be seen by none in the castle. Above all, do not tell a word of what I have told you to any of the other pages or knights. It is a secret,

and I command you to keep it as such. Do you promise?"

Giles nodded, then, with a heavy heart, turned from his companion and went to his narrow, cell-like room to remove his attractive castle clothing for the rags in which he had come to Lichester—rags which he had hoped never to wear again. Good food, exercise, and the work he loved, had made him grow rapidly since he had come to the castle, and his old clothing seemed small for him.

Throwing his long cape about him to hide his rags from the view of any of the castle folk, he started toward the courtyard, hoping that he would meet no one who would know him. On his way he met the Lady Millicent. Although he thought that his cape hid his clothing from view a bit of the blue smock showed, which Millicent was quick to recognize.

"You are going in disguise," she said. "It is a wise plan for, if you should chance to meet with any of Gillies's men, it would go hard with you if you were dressed in the garb of Lichester."

Giles looked at her in open-mouthed surprise. Gurth had told him that the venture was an important secret that must not be revealed, and yet Lady Millicent, who was only a slip of a girl, seemed to know not only that they were to go but that they might run into the enemy as well.

"I was so pleased and proud when I heard

Uncle Sibert and Aunt Constance praising you," she went on. "I heard him tell her that he was going to give you a chance to prove yourself worthy of the training you are receiving."

"Did he praise me?" asked Giles, his face alight with pleasure. "I am so glad that you told me. Now I can put up with all the hardships and the disagreeableness that come up with a good will. I shall do my best to live up to what he and Anselm expect of me."

"You must not forget that you are my Knight of the Star as well," she said softly. "It was to me that you first swore fealty and, really, you are the only knight I have, since I have lost my castle and lands. See," she continued drawing from her bodice a shining crimson scarf, "here is my token for you. Let me tie it about your arm."

Giles slipped the long cape from his shoulders and stood with it over one arm while she tied the scarf about the other.

"There," she said, with a final pat to the bow she had tied. "That means that I have chosen you to be my knight, and that you are pledged to do brave deeds in my name."

Giles slipped his cape about him, and together they left the castle for the courtyard.

Now, while Giles had been changing his clothing, Gurth had made the discovery that all the other pages knew that the honor of being messen-

ger to Job from Lord Sibert was to be given to Giles, and that it was to be kept a secret from him until after the meal. This knowledge alarmed Gurth, for it was going to be hard for him to get Giles out of the castle without having him suspect that anything was wrong.

As they left the castle, Millicent saw Roger sitting on the well-curb.

"I suppose you will take him," she said to Giles.

"I wish that it was Roger who was going," he replied sadly. "Taking orders from — Oh, well, complaining will do no good. All things in this world cannot be just as we would have them, little comrade, and, by the crimson scarf about my arm, I will do my best."

Hastily lifting her hand he kissed the small pink fingers in the courtly fashion of the day, then hurried off, leaving Millicent perplexed and worried. In the first place she was surprised that Giles knew anything about the affair for, from what her uncle had said, she thought that the honor was to be awarded him at the close of the meal. She had supposed that he would take Roger with him for a companion, for the two had been like brothers since the mock battle. She could not explain the change of plans and, therefore, it was with a troubled heart that she returned to her tapestry frame and took up her unfinished work.

Lord Sibert did not return to the castle for the

noon meal. Both Giles and Gurth were also absent from their places, but not until Ralph sent one of the other pages to look for them, were they missed by any one.

In spite of a thorough search, no trace could be found of either boy. Lady Millicent, who could have thrown some light on the matter, had returned to her tapestry-making at the close of the meal, and it was not until Roger, with a white, frightened face, came to her that she realized that anything was amiss.

"Why, he has gone upon the mission," she exclaimed. "I saw him as he left the castle, and we talked about the matter just before he went."

"Do you mean that you told him that he was to go upon a mission and what the mission was?" asked Roger almost accusingly.

"He knew," replied Millicent. "He was dressed in readiness for the adventure. He was sad about going, but pledged that he would do his best."

Roger looked at her as if he could hardly believe his ears. Why, every page and knight in the castle knew that an honor was being done to him. How could he be sad at being given a task that every other page in the courtyard would be overjoyed at having?

"But Ralph has not given him his commands," he said.

"Let's go to Ralph," replied Millicent. "Then I can tell him what he said to me."

Roger nodded assent. Millicent could see that he was feeling worried, and unhappy as well. She knew that Roger was fond of Giles and that he was hurt not to be chosen to go with him. Poor Roger! Millicent's tender heart ached for him. It was true that his body was not as strong as the bodies of the other pages, but surely his heart and brain more than made up for lack of strength. It was Giles who had first seen his worth, and it was he who had befriended him. Since the mock battle Roger had come into his own, for it was his counsel that Giles had acted upon, and it was this counsel, coupled with Giles's cleverness and dashing bravery, that had won that battle.

"Have you quarreled with Giles?" asked Millicent, trying to find out the reason why he had been left in favor of another.

"Indeed, no!" he replied. "I have not seen him since early morning, for our duties have not been the same. He did not even come to me to bid me farewell."

"Are you angry with him?" persisted Millicent.

"No," answered Roger. "I am not angry. I care too much for him for that, but I would willingly give the last five years of my life to be as strong and able to do things as he is."

They walked on in silence for a moment, then Roger spoke.

"What I can't understand is, why he should go off without orders from old Ralph. Some of the other pages, those who are so fond of Gurth, say that they think he is a traitor who has run off to sell the secrets of Lichester to Gillies's men. I told them that it was a black lie."

"There is something strange about this whole matter," said Millicent with a shake of her curls. "Oh, look! They are letting the drawbridge down."

The two children ran to the door of the gate, feeling almost sure that Lord Sibert was returning from Lichester Town, but it was not he. A weary man, gray with the dust of the road, entered the courtyard as soon as the drawbridge was lowered. His face was lined with exhaustion and sorrow. Quite a group of the castle inmates ran up to hear the news that he had come to tell, but he asked only for Lord Sibert. Upon being told that he was away, he turned to Ralph.

"A raid was made upon the houses belonging to Lichester, but nearest to Lord Gillies's land," he said. "Most of the people had fled to the woods and were unharmed, but Job, the spy, fell into their hands and was killed. The enemy have retreated back to Gillies, but Job is dead."

CHAPTER XXI

TO THE RESCUE

FOR a moment there was a stunned silence, then a howl of rage and vengeance went up from the pages and knights in the courtyard, for Job was a favorite with the men and older boys of the castle. For a moment, the result of this blow was not realized by either Millicent or Roger. Then, like a flash, came the thought—what of Giles and the other page that sallied forth that morning to report to Job? They were walking right into unavoidable danger, and doing so all unknowingly.

“Well,” exclaimed Ralph in relief, “I am glad that Giles was hidden so that I did not give him my message at the time planned. It would be like sending the lad into the jaws of death, to send him to land captured by the Gillies devils.”

Millicent sprang forward and caught the old man by the arm.

“If you didn’t send him, who did?” she exclaimed. “I know that he left the castle this morning on a mission for Lord Sibert, because he was dressed ready for leaving in his peasant garb. He was not at the table during the meals, nor was he anywhere to be found when you sent pages to look for him.”

Ralph looked at the girl as if he could not take in what she was trying to tell him.

"Left the castle?" he repeated stupidly. "He could not have left the castle, for it is against the rules for any one to leave or enter without permission. No one gave him that permission or told him what his mission was to be. You must be mistaken, Lady Millicent."

"I am not mistaken, for I tied my crimson scarf about his arm and bade him farewell," she replied almost sobbing. "If you search for him all over the castle you will not find him, for he has gone."

Without answering Ralph strode up to the man-at-arms on guard at the drawbridge.

"Did you let two boys pass out this morning, John?" he asked.

Much to Millicent's surprise the man shook his head. Where could Giles be? If he had not passed by that gate and drawbridge he must be in the castle grounds, and Roger and all the other pages were very sure that he was nowhere about.

"Isn't there any way by which he could have left the castle unobserved?" asked Sibert, the squire, who was one of the onlookers.

"There is a secret way," replied Ralph with a shake of his head, "but that way is unknown to him. Indeed, it is known only to your father, mother, yourself, and young Gurth. That is one of the secrets of the family."

At the name of young Gurth, Roger gave a little start, for the thought had just come to him that Gurth of Lichester was also missing. He remembered that he had not seen that young man all morning. Several possibilities flashed into his head. Giles had not gone alone. Could it be that he had taken Gurth with him? That seemed hardly possible, for there was such a decided dislike between the two boys. And yet —

There was the clear sound of the horn and again the drawbridge was lowered. This time it was Lord Sibert himself, clad in steel armor and riding on a war horse that thundered across the drawbridge, followed by a small group of knights and men-at-arms. That he had heard the sad news concerning Job was evident, for his first question was, "Where is young Giles of Avalon?"

"We don't know," replied Ralph. "The guard at the gate says that no two boys have passed through the gate, but Giles is missing. The whereabouts of your son, Gurth, is also unknown."

Lord Sibert gathered his reins into one hand and, with infinite care, for his armor was heavy and unwieldy, dismounted. As soon as he was on the ground, Millicent and Roger were at his side.

"He's gone, Uncle Sibert, for he bade me good-by this morning," exclaimed Millicent. "He told me that he must hurry off upon a mission for you. He seemed to know about what you wanted him to

do, and yet Ralph swears that he did not give him his orders."

"Who was his companion?" asked Lord Sibert drawing both children toward the hall, and motioning to Ralph to follow. "I expected that he would choose you, Roger."

"He wanted Roger," put in Millicent, screwing up her pretty forehead in order to think better. "He told me so, but then he said something else that I can't remember."

Ralph looked uncomfortable. He had just remembered that he had told Gurth to ask Giles to report after the meal, and that he had also told Gurth that he would be obliged to take orders from Giles. Neither boy had been at the meal. Perhaps Gurth had not given the message, but where, where could they be? When he had assigned Gurth as Giles's companion he had thought it a rather clever thing to do, but now in the light of the new trouble it seemed to him to be rather stupid.

The mission on which Giles was to be sent would not have been a dangerous one had all gone as had been planned, but now Job was dead and the enemy had overrun the place where he had been. Giles and his companion knew nothing about Job's death. They would walk into the danger, not knowing that danger was near. Two boys who disliked each other as thoroughly as did Giles and

Gurth would have difficulty in working together peacefully or well. Had Ralph known that Gurth had not given the message straight and that he had assumed the lead, he would have been even more troubled.

"Which of the pages did you send with Giles?" asked Lord Sibert.

"Your son," replied Ralph. "I thought that it would be good for his pride, to be obliged for a while to take orders from his inferior. He is due for a bad fall if he does not conquer his fault."

Now, Lord Sibert was perfectly just. The fact that he was Gurth's father did not in the least blind him to his son's faults. However, he was wise enough to see that it would be folly of the worst sort to expect the high-spirited Gurth to take orders from one so young and in such a humble position as Giles.

"There is no gainsaying that my son needs a lesson," he said dryly, "and it will be such a lesson as life itself will teach to him before his hair is gray, but I should not try to teach it at such a time as this when a mistake may cause the death of both boys. Gurth is hot-headed and impulsive. He will not take kindly to high-handed ways."

A mist came into the old man's eyes.

"I was wrong, very wrong," he muttered. "I told him to find Giles and tell him that he was to report to me for further orders, but he did not come

nor did Gurth. I told Gurth that he would be under Giles's orders, at which he was very angry."

"But Gurth wasn't under Giles's orders," exclaimed Millicent, a sudden gleam of understanding flashing over her face. "When I last saw Giles he was dressed in his peasant garb. I know, for although at first he was all wrapped up in his long cape I saw a tattered bit of blue between its folds which I recognized. I saw how he was clad when I tied my scarf about his arm. Just before seeing Giles, I saw Gurth. He was dressed in his uniform of a page. Besides, Giles was not as happy as he would have been if he were about to be intrusted with an important mission. I could not understand it for, to me, being given this task was such an honor. I remember now that he said something about being under some one's command and about doing bravely a thing that was difficult."

"Do you think that my son did not give the right message to Giles?" asked Lord Sibert sternly.

Tears came into Lady Millicent's eyes, for he had never spoken to her so harshly before.

"I do not know," replied the child sadly.

"It looks like it," broke in Ralph excitedly. "I recall now that he did not make so much of a fuss about carrying my message as I expected."

"They did not go through the big gate and across the drawbridge," put in Roger, "and only

the members of the house of Lichester know the secret path from the chapel to the wood outside the walls."

Lord Sibert rose hastily. That every moment his son and the boy his brother Anselm loved so dearly were drawing nearer to danger, he knew. They must be stopped before they reached the place where Job had been stationed. Going to the courtyard he ordered several of the knights to take their horses and ride to the town that lay nearest to the land of Lord Gillies, keeping close lookout for the pages that were missing.

"They won't find them," said Roger gloomily. "Giles will keep close to the woods and will leave the highways. I wish that I were with him."

"They wouldn't let you go," said Millicent positively.

"And yet I am the boy that Giles would have taken with him had he been given his choice, as Lord Sibert has suggested," he replied. "I should be with him now. Two heads are better than one any time, and Gurth will be a menace rather than a help. Millicent, if I could manage it, I would go to him."

As they talked, they had approached the well in the courtyard. A wagon-load of squawking hens had just been driven into the yard. These were being unloaded not far from the well. Since the news of Job's death had reached the castle there

were new signs of preparation for a long siege. The burned houses and the death of Job told the defenders of the castle that, at last, the enemy was getting ready to strike. Millicent pointed to one of the empty wagons which was leaving the castle grounds.

"If I wanted to follow after Giles, I should try to leave the castle in one of those wagons. If I was a boy I should do it, but I know that I should be worse than useless to him for I'm nothing but a girl." She spoke bitterly.

"Well, anyway, you have given me an idea," Roger said enthusiastically.

A few moments later he was bargaining with a ragged little peasant, who had been helping his father unload. To him he offered a suit of castle clothing in exchange for his ragged smock. This offer was promptly accepted and the exchange was made. No one noticed. Every one was too busy with the preparation for war to take heed of simple little peasant boys. The empty chicken-coops were piled up in the wagon, which went creaking and jolting to the drawbridge. No one noticed the little figure in patched faded blue that crouched inside one of the coops. The guard lowered the bridge and the wagon creaked over it. Roger, crouched inside the coop, peeped out and saw the huge ropes pull the drawbridge into place. He was outside the castle in safety.

Meanwhile, what of Giles and Gurth? They had gone directly from the courtyard to the chapel. There Giles had knelt, while Gurth tied about his eyes a bandage.

"It would never do for a common peasant to learn the secrets of Lichester Castle," he had said, as he tied the cloth about Giles's eyes. Giles heard the sliding of a panel and felt the damp, cold air that rushed to meet them. Gurth had brought one of the torches and, by its flickering light, was able to see fairly well, but to Giles the way was hidden. It seemed that he stumbled along in darkness for ages. Although Gurth kept his hand upon Giles's arm he was not particularly careful to guide him in the smoothest way and, because of this carelessness, Giles got several unnecessary bumps.

As they got nearly to the end of the passage Giles stubbed his toe and fell on the floor in such a way as to loosen the bandage across his eyes. As he picked himself up he saw, in the dim light before him, Gurth standing in the doorway that seemed to lead into a cellar beyond. The bandage was only several seconds from his eyes, but in those seconds Giles marked well the position of that door.

Gurth led him across a stone floor and up a steep flight of stone stairs. A few minutes later they stepped out into the warm sunlight. Giles could feel it upon his head and hands in spite of his

blindfolded eyes. Gurth was cautious, very cautious, for he led Giles quite a way before he allowed him to remove the bandage which he had fastened about his eyes but, because all this care was useless, Giles smiled. His one glance, when the bandage fell from his eyes, had given him a very clear notion of where he was. The marshiness of the ground beneath his feet confirmed his thought. The secret passage from Lichester Castle led to a ruined stone structure of an earlier time, which stood in a marsh not more than a mile from Lichester Castle.

It is not necessary to tell much about the first part of that journey. Gurth kept well to the underbrush and woods. Both boys were careful to move quietly, not desiring to betray their presence to any of the people that might be passing. Neither talked much. Gurth had given Giles very plainly to understand that he was master of the expedition, and that Giles was merely there to serve him. Giles was silent, because he found that any attempt at conversation from him merely called out a sarcastic retort from his comrade.

However, such a state of affairs was unnatural and, before the sun had sunk into the west, the stiff silence was broken. Gurth's deep admiration for Anselm led him to ask many questions about his hero and Giles, who loved Anselm like a father, was ready to talk of him. Very slowly the hard

feeling of dislike was beginning to melt and, although neither boy realized it, neither hated the other quite as heartily when they lay down together beneath the stars.

As they lay there, they talked in low whispers. Giles told how Anselm had met the burly Guilbert on Rhywick Hill, and how, by marvelous feats of swordsmanship and bravery, he had twisted the steel from his opponent's hand. He told about the escape from Avalon, and how he and Millicent had lived for weeks with the Gypsies. And, as he listened, a feeling of envy came into the heart of Gurth. He, Gurth of the house of Lichester, was envying this boy whom he had called a common peasant, and wishing that he might have some such adventure as Giles had known. Yet, because the world was so big and so dark, and because there were strange night sounds all about him, he lay there trembling, seeming to hear Gypsies and the soldiers of Lord Gillies in every bush. Long after Giles was lying fast asleep, with his curly head resting upon his arm, Gurth lay awake with strange thoughts to keep him company. Never had the world seemed so big and awesome a place to him before. Far above him the stars shone faintly, half-veiled by the wind-tossed wisps of clouds that passed over them, between them and the sleeping earth. The wind rustled through the forest, setting the leaves to talking among them-

selves, and slowly new thoughts came to the boy lying there upon the ground for the first time. Never had the world seemed so big, or he so small and insignificant. His trick, which had seemed so clever that morning, dwindled until it was shown to him in its true light—contemptible.

It was a cowardly deed to take the command that was intended for another boy and now, lying in the light of the stars, he saw it in its true colors. People admired Giles because he was straightforward, brave, and true. He knew that they did not care for him, and often it had hurt his feelings sadly. It had been Giles's popularity that he had envied. Perhaps he could build his own character up in such a way as to make people admire and like him. He determined to begin this course of courage the very next day. He would confess his trick to Giles and turn over his command. Then, well pleased with his resolution and filled with an exalted feeling of having stepped into a new life, he wrapped his cape more closely about him and, rolled up in its folds, slept.

Ah, yes, the night seemed wrapped in slumber, but things are not always what they seem! A weary little figure, clad in a ragged blue smock, slowly plodding its way along the road, two boys asleep on the hillside, one in the brave attire of castle garb, the other in the humble, shabby, blue of a peasant, and, near the hill, talking in whispers

so guarded that they could not be heard a yard away, two men, one in the steel armor engraved with the mark of Gillies and the other, Alford of Avalon!

CHAPTER XXII

AN OLD ENEMY APPEARS

THE next morning Giles awakened very early. He saw the dark shadows lift from the sleeping world. The stars faded away in the light of coming morning. There was a faint twitter of bird songs above his head and the wind barely fluttered the leaves. He sat up, rubbing the sleep from his eyes, for a moment almost believing himself to be back at Avalon, but the sight of the sleeping Gurth recalled all to his mind.

He stretched himself out luxuriously, blinked, and stretched himself again. It was a joy to be alive on such a glorious morning. It had been dusk the night before when they had chosen this place for sleeping-quarters. It had seemed to be well-sheltered and, being on a hill, would command a good view of the country about. A tall pine-tree stood near by. So tall and straight was it that, to Giles, it seemed to be a gigantic finger pointing to the very sky. Now Giles was very agile, and he loved to climb trees. Besides, he had not climbed one since he had come to Lichester Castle. Aside from the temptation there was something to be gained by the ascent, for the whole countryside would be spread out before him. It

would be well to know something about the country through which they were to go.

He scrambled to his feet and threw back his fair hair, unmindful of the bits of pine-needles and twigs enmeshed in it. Then, without wasting any time, he began to climb the tree, clinging to its stout trunk with both hands and knees. Up, up, and up he went, filled with the sheer joy of the climb. At last he reached the branch-crowned top of the tree and, with one leg swung comfortably over a branch and his arm about the trunk of the tree; he sat in perfect enjoyment.

To the north across intervening fields, woods, and small thatch-covered homes, he could see the castle of Lichester, a huge bulk silhouetted against the rosy morning sky. To the southeast lay Lichester Town. It seemed very deserted. As Giles knew, this was partly due to the fact that it was very early in the morning, and partly because many of the villagers had either taken to the forest or come to the castle for safety from Lord Gillies.

The thought of Lord Gillies drew his regard to the west, for he knew that was the direction in which his castle lay. The wind, which had been blowing from the northwest, shifted suddenly more to the west, bringing with it a whiff of smoke. There before him, though at some distance, lay desolation. What had once been a pretty group of thatched cottages was now a smouldering heap

of ashes. There were no signs of people. Whether they had escaped into the forest before the attack, or whether they lay butchered by Lord Gillies's men, Giles could not tell.

Gurth had told him the night before that they would find Job in the vicinity, probably staying at one of the deserted cottages, but there were no cottages left. The whole place was marked with the spirit of death and desolation. Where was Job? Had he fled away into the forest, or had he been captured and tortured?

All the joy that had been in Giles's heart fled in view of the calamity that had overtaken Lichester. He had known that Lord Gillies was stronger than Lord Sibert, being able, as he was, to get help from John. He had known that Lord Sibert's only chance lay in defending the castle, and holding it against the long tiring siege that would be imposed upon it. It would be Lord Gillies's plan to starve them out. If Sibert could hold out until Richard returned to England, all would be well. If he could not hold out, the whole land would be given over to fire and the sword. Giles thus got his first sight of actual war from the tree-top and, looking down upon its hideousness, flaming anger came into his heart.

"If I ever get to be a knight," he thought, "I will not make war on women or children. I will not burn houses nor kill anything weaker than my-

self. It is cowardly, and a knight should not be a coward."

Filled with a sense of horror at the results of the raid and anxious to impart his knowledge to Gurth, he slipped his leg over the branch and began to descend. He had hardly gone a yard when sounds from below made him pause. There was a sudden exclamation, followed by men's voices and a boy's scream of anger and warning. Looking down through his screen of pine-needles Giles could see Gurth surrounded by seven or eight burly, mail-clad figures. Gurth was laying out vigorously with the cudgel he had provided himself with the night before, but it was an unequal fight at best. Giles could see that Gurth's opponents were not trying to kill him. Their idea seemed to be to take him prisoner.

Giles's first impulse was to climb down the tree and fight with Gurth against the enemy, but his shrewd common sense showed him how foolish such a move would be. Two young boys could not hope for success against seven men. If Giles were captured all chance of escape would be cut off, for he would not be able to do anything to free Gurth if he were a captive himself. Being free, a chance might arise whereby he might rescue him, so he clung to his tree trunk watching, while Gurth was robbed of his cudgel and firmly bound to the very tree at the top of which he was sitting.

The noise of the scuffle had served two other purposes, unknown to either Gurth or Giles. Roger, who had also awakened early that morning in his eagerness to find Giles and to warn him of danger, on his way up the other side of the hill, was warned of danger in time to hide himself securely. He was so near the scene of the struggle that he heard and recognized Gurth's scream. Faint with fear for Giles, he crouched low in the thicket, wondering what to do next.

Gurth's scream had also attracted the attention of the two men who had been talking the night before. They came hurrying up the hill from the other side to find out the cause of the uproar.

Lord Gillies was a short thick-set man with a very red face and small pig-like eyes. What there was of his neck was short and thick. A wicked-looking sword, scarred and battered by use, hung by his side. He leered at Gurth with an expression of triumph, but it was not on this man that Giles's attention was centered. The sight of his companion had sent a horrid chill down his spine, for here, in the company of the man who had determined to capture Lichester Castle, was the man he least wished to see, Lord Alford, uncle and enemy to Millicent of Avalon. Giles would have recognized the man anywhere. There was the tall, thin figure, the dark, sinister face upon which wickedness had set its seal, and

the shifty, untrustworthy eyes. Alford was at Lichester in the company of the man who had visions of leveling the castle to the ground.

Giles knew well enough why Alford was there. As long as the Lady Millicent, the rightful owner of the castle, was alive and in other hands than his own, his position as Lord of Avalon was insecure. He had, therefore, joined with Lord Gillies, with the understanding that when the castle fell the Lady Millicent would be turned over to him. All this Giles realized in a flash. It was the worst thing possible that Gurth should have fallen into the enemy's hands, for it gave them a strong advantage over those at Lichester. In those days boys were considered of infinitely more worth than girls. Lord Gillies might promise to give him up in exchange for the Lady Millicent. It would be dreadful to give a helpless little girl over to her enemy but, to save the life of his own son, Sibert might be tempted to do it.

Then Giles realized that here was his chance to prove himself worthy of knighthood, and to repay Lord Sibert for the training he had given as well as to repay Anselm for the love and care he had always received at his hands. If he rescued Gurth, that would repay Lord Sibert. By rescuing Gurth he would be saving Lady Millicent. He had sworn fealty to her, and was bound by his promise to serve her. Everything depended upon his abil-

ity to rescue Gurth. It would take a cool head and a good plan.

Meanwhile, Gurth wriggled and twisted, but in vain, yet he did not call out to Giles. That did not mean, however, that he was silent, by any means. In a loud tone of voice he berated the men of Gilleys. One of the men-at-arms gave him a cuff, at which he gave a loud bellow of pain and rage.

"What a coward!" thought Giles as he sat there far above, listening. Surely he was talking and carrying on much more loudly than necessary. Giles had never seen him act in so babyish a fashion. He was wailing out his troubles as a pig about to be butchered would wail out his. Then understanding came to Giles. It was Gurth's way of warning him of the danger that they were in. He would not let the enemy know that another boy was with him, but he did want Giles to know of the danger.

"I wish I could let him know where I am," he thought to himself. "I wonder how I could."

He twisted off a pine-twig and when the men, preparing their morning meal, were not looking he let it drop. Gurth did not seem to notice the fall of the first twig so Giles tried again. This time the bit of branch fell upon Gurth's head. The third also hit him. He was tied in such a way that he was unable to look up, but Giles, from his high perch, saw him open and close his left

hand three times and knew that he was aware of his presence.

After the meal was over Gillies and Alford came to look at their prisoner.

"He is from Lichester Castle," said the highly pleased Lord Gillies. "I can tell by the cut of his clothing. What luck! We will make him tell us of the armament."

Gurth set his teeth together firmly and cast a look of deadly hate toward his hereditary enemy. Lord Alford leaned forward, looking closely at the boy's face.

"It is even better than that," he exclaimed excitedly. "He is one of the family, probably a younger son of the lord of the castle."

"Are you sure?" broke in Lord Gillies.

"Sure!" exclaimed Lord Alford. "Of course, I am sure. You can't mistake that face. I know the family well, for didn't my older brother marry one of them in spite of the hatred that has existed between the two families for years! He paid for that marriage with his life, and she died from the shock of his death. But, no more of that matter. I know the family and I can trace the family likeness in this lad."

They discussed their plans very freely as they partook of their morning meal. Both were in rare good spirits at the capture they had made. Giles gathered from their conversation that they had

seen large numbers of Lord Sibert's men riding about the countryside and that they intended to keep out of their way, as there were nine of them against many of Lord Sibert's. They intended to take Gurth to Lord Gillies's castle and from there send a message to his father. During the time between the sending of the message and its expected answer they would make a surprise attack on Lichester, hoping to take Lord Sibert off his guard. That meant that the attack would be made in a very short time.

Meanwhile, not very far away in the thicket, Roger had seen the falling bits of bark. Like Gurth he had laid no importance upon the first nor on the second, but when the third was followed by a fourth he looked upward. A flutter of blue made his heart leap for joy, for it told him that while Giles was in a precarious place, still he was free.

When the meal was over, Gurth was unbound from his tree and hurried off between two of the men-at-arms. As soon as the last man was out of sight Giles slipped from his perch, and carefully descended the tree. Much to his joy and surprise, he found Roger waiting for him below. Very quickly Roger told Giles of what had gone on at the castle since he had left it the previous morning. He told him of the message that had been brought concerning the death of Job, and he also

told of how it was Lord Sibert's plan that Giles, instead of Gurth, be in command. Giles listened to everything in amazement.

"I suppose you hate him even more for the trick he played on you," said Roger.

Giles hesitated. Of course it was a mean trick, and yet he found that he did not hate Gurth so badly as he felt that he should. Instead of hate, he found pity in his heart for his former enemy.

"No," he replied after a minute's thought. "I do not hate him. I almost like him. I think that if we had met each other under other circumstances we should be friends. You see, he did not let any of them know that there was another boy from Lichester. It took courage and common sense not to call for my help when he was fighting all those men. Besides, after I let him know where I was, he did not betray me and he might have thought that, when I saw danger coming, I hid myself away without letting him know there was cause for fear. We've got to rescue him, Roger."

"After playing so mean a trick on you, he ought to suffer the consequences," grumbled Roger, who plainly was not in a forgiving frame of mind. "However, I suppose you are right. How are we going to do it?"

"The fate of the Lady Millicent of Avalon depends upon it," replied Giles.

"Lady Millicent!" replied Roger in surprise. "How is it possible that she is mixed up in this affair?"

In low, guarded tones Giles told Roger the story of how Lady Millicent had been obliged to flee away from her castle to escape from the plans of her uncle. He told him of their stay with the Gypsies.

"Lord Alford guessed that she was taken to her Uncle Sibert's castle, and, when he found out that Lord Gillies was going to make an attack on Lichester, he offered him his help if he would promise to turn over the Lady Millicent to him. We must rescue Gurth to keep Lady Millicent from danger."

"That is all very well to talk about," replied Roger, "but how, I ask you, are we going to do it?"

"We must follow them," replied Giles. "Farther than that I do not know."

They did not do much talking after that, for they did not want the sound of their own voices to betray them. It was not a hard task to trail the men they were following, for it was plain that they were not foresters. Both boys were thinking deeply but it seemed to no avail, for neither of them could think up a sensible plan. They were getting farther and farther from Lichester. It was a very hot day in late summer, for there was no

breath of wind stirring. It was quite a relief when at last Lord Gillies called a halt, and, after giving orders that the prisoner be securely bound to a tree, stretched himself out not far away to rest. His example was soon followed by the rest of the men.

From his place of hiding, Giles saw that Gurth was so near to exhaustion that he hung limply against the tree. Every line of his body expressed weariness. An anxious glance at Roger showed that he, too, was nearly too tired to go farther.

"We must separate," he whispered in Roger's ear. "If we are both captured, Lord Sibert will get no word of warning. I am going to free Gurth. You go to yonder large rock and wait there for me. I will slip up to Gurth and cut him loose. I'll whisper to him to slip away in the same direction. I'll meet you later. If anything happens to me, do not try to help me. Go back to the castle and tell all that I have told you to Lord Sibert."

"I will do it," replied Roger simply and, without wasting words or time, he crept off in the direction of the big rock. Fortunately for their plan the forest was well-wooded and there were many small trees behind which it was easy to hide. As soon as he had given Roger time to reach the rock in safety, Giles began to creep softly through the underbrush toward the tree where Gurth was

bound. After getting as near as he dared he paused, to wait until the heat should make the enemy sleepy. How long he had to wait he could not have told, but it seemed like a long time. Fortune and the stifling hot day favored him for, filled with good food and contentment, the men-at-arms stretched themselves out intending to sleep during the heat of the day. Giles felt himself growing sleepy during the long wait, but at last his patience was rewarded. There was no sign of life from the weary men. Trusting to their sheltered position and to the fact that Gurth was securely bound, they had left no guard.

Giles crept nearer, one hand upon his hunting-knife at his side. Nearer and nearer he crept, so quietly that hardly a twig crackled. Gurth himself, who was the only one awake, did not see him until he was almost at his side. With a few, quick movements Giles cut the bonds that held him, allowing him to struggle free. At first his muscles were so stiff and sore that he could hardly move them. But Giles gave him no time. Hurriedly, they crossed the open space to the wood beyond. Giles was very careful to leave a clumsy trail behind him. He scuffed at the ground beneath his feet. As soon as they reached the wood on the other side of the clearing, he changed his tactics.

“We are going to separate now,” he whispered. “If those men wake up and find you gone they will

search the woods until they find us. I am going to lure them away from you. Roger is hiding behind that big rock. I want you to go to him and wait there until I come. If they search in that direction you will see them coming and escape, but I think they will follow me. If I am not there by evening you must go to the castle and tell your father what has happened. Quick, now, off with your clothes! You must change with me."

Gurth opened his mouth to protest, but it was of no use. Giles's only reply was to bid him to hurry. As Giles drew the costume of the castle page onto himself Gurth turned to him impulsively. "I played a mean trick on you, Giles," he said soberly. "I took the command that was supposed to be yours. I want you to know that I am sorry and that I am grateful to you for saving my life at a risk of your own. I don't suppose you want to be friends with a boy who was so mean but, Giles, I'd be honored by your friendship."

Giles had no time to do more than open his mouth when he was interrupted by a roar from one of the men-at-arms. A fly buzzing about the man's nose had awakened him and, upon turning over, he saw that the prisoner had escaped. Giles did not try to speak. He pressed Gurth's arm as he silently pointed to the rock behind which Roger was waiting.

There was no time to waste, for every one of the



WITH A FEW, QUICK MOVEMENTS GILES CUT THE BONDS THAT
HELD HIM.—*Page 271.*

enemy was now thoroughly awake. Gurth ran off through the woods, sheltered from the view of the men by a screen of young growth. Giles held his position until he was sure that Gurth was safe. Then, as the men were beginning to separate in a dangerous fashion, he rushed through the woods in the opposite direction, crashing dead branches underfoot and screaming as he had heard Gurth scream that very morning.

Lord Gillies saw a flash of color which he recognized as being the color of the pages' smocks at Lichester. Calling his men hastily, he at once set off in hot haste after his former captive. Giles, giving a backward glance to see that the chase was on, stopped shouting. He knew that he would need every bit of breath and strength to escape.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE CHASE

LUCKILY for the success of Giles's plan he had been brought up in the woods, and knew from previous experience how to move both quickly and quietly through the forest. It was no part of his plan to make a quick escape for that would bring Gurth and Roger into danger. It would be wiser to lead the enemy on a long roundabout chase which would give Gurth and Roger a chance to escape without fail. As he ran rather slowly through the wood the thought came to him of the chase that Anselm had led the men of Avalon when they were combing the woods for the Lady Milliecent. He remembered how he had said that he would enjoy leading Lord Alford through a bramble and thorn-apple patch. Well, here was his wish fulfilled.

As he had noticed when he followed their trail from the pine-tree, these were no foresters. They crashed through the forest, stumbling over fallen branches and tripping over vines. With extreme pleasure Giles saw his enemy fall over a half-rotted stump. He took great care not to turn his face toward them when they were close upon his heels, for it would be fatal if they were to see that it was

not the boy who had been tied to the tree that they were chasing.

Giles could tell by the sound of their voices that they were furiously angry as well as frightened, and they knew that to have Gurth escape would be a terrible blow to their plans. Therefore, they would use every means in their power to capture him. He also knew that they were armed with swords for the most part, but one fellow had a bow and arrows. Giles was careful to keep a few trees and a reasonable distance between himself and the archer for, while he knew that they were not likely to shoot with any intention to kill, still they might order the archer to shoot him in such a way as to disable him.

Giles had a very good sense of direction and well he knew that he was being chased toward the property of Lord Gillies. In following this course he was running into danger, for it was more than possible that he would run into the hands of others fighting under Lord Gillies's standard. This, however, was unavoidable because, toward the north and lying between him and the Lichester property, stretched a swamp that was well-known as being a dangerous bit of country. He could, however, turn toward the south and, that being much safer than keeping on toward the west, he made the change in that direction.

He had led them a long way from the hid-

place of Roger. Soon he would widen the distance between himself and his pursuers by quickening his speed. Then, by changing his course and redoubling his speed, he would be able to throw them off his trail. He was getting tired and thirsty. It would be a great relief to be able to throw himself flat on the ground beneath a tree and relax every muscle in a few minutes' rest. A fleeting backward glance showed him that the enemy, too, were flagging, and that Lord Alford was limping. Lord Gillies, who was short and fat, was red in the face and panting like a weary dog, but neither he nor Lord Alford would give up; Giles knew, for all their hope of forcing the Lord of Lichester to pay a heavy sum of gold and making him hand over the Lady Millicent to her uncle depended upon keeping him a prisoner.

The forest into which he plunged grew denser, and more difficult for even Giles to penetrate. There were low bushes, bramble vines, and short, scrubby, young growth that barred the way. Giles's clothing was torn to fluttering ribbons and a fine network of scratches ornamented his face and arms. It was not so easy to widen the distance between himself and the enemy as he had thought it would be. Determination to regain him at all costs forced Lord Gillies and Lord Alford on, in spite of the heat of the day and the difficulties of the search. Liberal rewards spurred on his men.

However, their heavy coats of mail made progress hard for them and gave Giles a decided advantage.

Beyond the dense clumps of bushes was an open space, with forest on the other side. This sloped downward. The forest was more open than the woods through which he had been running. It, too, sloped toward the river which flowed at the base of the hill. Along one side of this open space ran the road and along the road, to Giles's horror and dismay, were riding several knights on horseback. A single glance at their trappings told the frightened boy that they were men of Gillies's castle. His pursuers at the same time realized the approach of allies.

A triumphant yell from Lord Gillies brought the knights to a full stop. Lord Gillies was so out of breath from his long chase that for several moments, which were precious to the fleeing boy, he could not speak, but the moments were very few.

"After him," he panted, pointing to the tired Giles who was just entering the wood on the other side of the clearing. "A reward in gold I will give to the man who catches him for me."

Without wasting any time in talk, several of the knights dismounted hastily into the woods in pursuit of Giles. The situation was critical. Giles knew that he would be very lucky if he were to get off with his life, for he realized that when Lord Gillies learned that he had been led on that long,

wild-goose chase after the wrong boy, his wrath would be aroused to the point of inflicting almost any punishment on the offender. Giles was very tired, for the chase had been a long, hard one. What chance would he have against three men who were well-rested and fresh! The sweat stood out upon his face and his clothing clung closely to him. It chafed his skin, rubbing against his scratches in a most painful way.

Before him was another thicket of bushes and beyond that the river.

A few moments later the enemy broke through the barrier of bushes that rimmed the river. It was late in the summer and the river was very low, but still it was too deep for a boy to wade across it and no boy would have had time to swim it. Up and down the river they looked, but saw nothing but an innocent-looking log floating down its sluggish current. Up and down the banks they searched, beating down the bushes and prodding the tufts of grass with their swords. Lord Alford and Lord Gillies joined in the search, but in vain. If Giles had suddenly developed wings and flown away he could not have disappeared more completely or more mysteriously. For more than half an hour, by modern time, they searched. The knights were so positive that the boy had not time to cross the river before they burst through the bushes, that the affair seemed most strange. Lord

Gillies raved at his men, driving them by his wrath to search even more, but in vain. It was most tantalizing to have had such a chance within his grip, only to lose it.

CHAPTER XXIV

WAR

AND meanwhile, where was Giles? He had disappeared as completely as if the ground had swallowed him, or the water of the river closed over his head. In spite of the lengthy search that was made for the young page of Lichester, no trace of him could be found by any of the men-at-arms of either Lord Gillies or Lord Alford. The search was a thorough one. Up and down the bank they went beating down the bushes, but to no avail.

“Witchcraft,” muttered one of the men.

“He drowned himself rather than fall into our hands,” said another.

“Pah, that coward!” ejaculated another. “He’d never dare do that. Didn’t you hear him squeal when we first caught him, and didn’t he go shrieking through the wood as if the devil himself were on his heels.”

“What I can’t understand is how he got away in the first place,” put in another. “His bonds were cut by a knife.”

“He must have wriggled one arm free and reached his knife,” suggested the first. “It is no use looking here, for our bird has flown. I don’t

see how he could have gotten away without flying unless, as you say, his body is under the surface of the river, and we have looked well along the bank."

There was more truth to this than they knew. During much of the time, Giles was as nearly under water as he safely could be. The small part of his body exposed was his nose. Seeing that escape was practically impossible by flight he had resorted to strategy. Lying on the bank of the river was a huge log and, by dint of much hard but rapid work, the boy shoved it into the water. A forester would have noted the trail left by the log, but these men were not foresters. The boy waded out into the water, dragging the log after him. As soon as he reached deeper water he put his arms about the log, gripping it also with his knees, then, with his face only out of the water on the farther side of the log, he floated slowly down the sluggish current.

It was an awful feeling, to lie hidden in the water so close that he could hear the cursing of the enemy, and their threats of what they would like to do with the "little varmint" when they at last caught him. Each second seemed a minute, and every minute seemed an hour. Giles had been hot when he reached the river's brink—so hot that the cool water had seemed very grateful to him—but now he was shaking with cold. Even after the enemy appeared to have left, he did not dare to

change his position for several moments for fear that their leaving would prove to be only a trick.

At last, feeling sure that the enemy had gone, he threw his arm up over the log and lifted his head. Everything was very still. Only the ripples caused by his movement marred the smoothness of the stream. A few lusty strokes brought the log out of the deep water. He waded to shore and started off as briskly as possible for the place where he had left Roger and Gurth. It was a long way, for he had purposely led Lord Gillies a long chase, but his sense of direction was good and he did not waste any time. Although there was no sign of the enemy, he advanced cautiously.

It was getting late in the afternoon. He had told Roger not to wait for him too long, but to go to Lord Sibert and tell him all that had happened. He was very anxious to reach the rock before Roger should start for Lichester, for now that both Gurth and he had escaped from the enemy he wanted the exact story of what had happened to reach the master of the castle. If Lord Sibert thought that Giles had fallen into the hands of Lord Gillies, he would send out a relief expedition in which lives might be lost.

He hurried along, trying to forget the discomfort of sticky, wet clothing. In two places he shortened the distance by going across lots. At last, breathless with fatigue, he reached the shelter

of the rock where he was greeted with enthusiasm by both Gurth and Roger. Flinging himself on the ground he relaxed his muscles, and lay quietly taking in long breaths while the other two boys plied him with questions.

He told them of the chase which led nearer and nearer to Lord Gillies's land, and of the swamp which lay between him and Lichester.

"I would have gotten away easily," he said, "if it wasn't for the fact that we met more of Lord Gillies's men who were not tired, like the rest of us. Then I very nearly did give up, for I didn't see how I could escape from them, and if it was not for that blessed log I should be a captured prisoner this very day."

A rest was necessary, for the boy was almost exhausted and could not have gone on without.

"We will be able to make up this time that we seem to lose," said Roger quietly. "If we went on now we could not go very fast for you are so tired, but after a short rest we can travel quickly, and cover much ground before nightfall."

It was very quiet. Even the leaves hung motionless in the still air. There were no birds' songs, but a soft, sleepy twittering told of their presence. There was a sweet, woodsy odor and the incessant whirr of insects. Roger gave a great sigh of pure comfort, and idly watched an ant laboriously pulling a bit of food to her hole. As she drew near

the hole another ant came to meet her. The newcomer took hold of the bit of food, and both ants pulled together.

"How little ants are," he commented to the others. "I suppose that they care just as much for that sand-pile as we do for Lichester Castle."

Giles sat up suddenly.

"We must be getting along," he said, getting up. "You know that they were planning a surprise attack, and I believe they will start it even sooner than they planned. I wouldn't be surprised if they tried to make it this very night, for they know that if Gurth really escaped he would give the warning."

He started off through the woods as he spoke, and the others followed him. They went rapidly, not wasting any time in conversation. Fortunate it was that Giles was well-used to the woods, for they did not dare to venture out upon the road.

"If we could go through the swamp we could cut off a long piece," said Gurth, pointing toward the verdant valley below.

"It would be risking too much," said Roger positively. "Not only is it unsafe for one who does not know every way and byway in it, but there are islands in it on which desperate robbers and murderers are said to live. Neither of you fellows has been around the castle long, but I've heard the most awful tales of it."

"We must take no risks," said Giles. "We might throw away our own lives if we wished, if the lives of others did not depend upon them. What is the matter, Gurth?"

Gurth's answer was a grimace of pain. "I turned my ankle and twisted it a while ago," he replied. "I didn't say anything about it, but it is getting worse at every step."

Giles bent over to look at it. He could see that it was swelling, and that Gurth was quite right when he said that he had twisted it badly. "What shall we do?" he exclaimed in dismay.

"Don't mind me," Gurth replied pluckily. "I'll get along somehow."

For some time they walked in silence, but Giles could see that Gurth's pace got slower and slower. He regarded him with anxiety, noting the tightly-set teeth and the pucker of pain between his eyes. At last, he called a halt.

"This won't do," he said abruptly. "We won't get there until after the fight begins, at this rate. One of us has got to stay here with Gurth, and the other must go on to Lichester and give the news. What do you think about it?"

"Both of you go on," said Gurth bitterly. "I don't deserve to have either of you stay with me."

Giles threw one arm over Gurth's shoulder with a friendly pressure, as he said, "I am not in the habit of going back on my friends, Gurth."

A warm light came into Gurth's eyes, and he looked pathetically grateful to Giles. "You really mean that you will be my friend?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Giles.

"I had better stay behind, Giles," said Roger. "I am not as strong as you are, and cannot go as fast. If you see one of the men of Lichester, send him after us."

Giles hesitated. He hated to go off and leave Gurth, but what Roger had said was true.

"It's a good plan," said Gurth, so Giles, after a rather broken farewell, hurried off through the woods.

"Wait a minute," called Roger. When Giles returned, Roger pulled off his faded blue smock and handed it to him. "You'll be safer in it," he said.

After more than an hour's walk, Giles reached Lichester Town. Just before he reached the town itself, several knights from the castle rode down the dusty road. It was another group of horsemen from the castle whom Lord Sibert had sent out to search for the lost pages. As they reached Giles, the boy called to them to stop.

"If it is not the little peasant page," cried out one of the men. "Where is your master's son?"

Young Sibert, the squire, came riding up to him. "Where is my brother, Giles?" he cried out. "Is he dead or captured? Why are you alone?"

"He is hurt, but not seriously," exclaimed Giles. "His ankle is twisted so he cannot walk. You will find him somewhere near the top of that hill." He pointed to the direction from which he had come.

"You had better go with us and show us the exact spot," said one of the knights.

Giles shook his head.

"I have important news that I must give at once to Lord Sibert," he replied. "I hoped to find a horse to ride here in Lichester."

Sibert swung himself from his own beautiful horse and held out the bridle to Giles.

"I'll get another mount at Lichester," he said. "Father always keeps several extra ones on hand, and the keeper of them will give one to me sooner than he would to you. I should have seen how nearly spent you are."

The kind young squire helped the tired Giles to mount the horse. Then he turned to the others.

"Ride along," he said. "I will soon catch up with you."

The change from foot to horse was a most welcome one for Giles. At Avalon he had envied the brave knights and squires their fine horses. Now he was riding a beauty. At Avalon he had longed for a chance to show himself worthy of knighthood. Chances seemed to be coming his way. It was nearly dark when he reached Lichester Castle,

and the drawbridge was up. The keeper of the bridge saw the tired little figure and recognized his horse, so he lowered the bridge at once. When Giles rode across the bridge, the man took him by the arm.

"Where are young Gurth and Roger?" he asked sternly. "How does it happen that you come riding back on the squire's horse?"

In a very few words Giles told the man that Gurth and Roger were safe, that Sibert had given him the horse to ride, and that he must see Lord Sibert at once. Lord Sibert had heard the drawbridge lowered and the sound of the horse's feet as they crossed it. He strode out to meet Giles as the boy started across the courtyard. Giles gave a cry of joy when he saw him.

"I am so glad that you are here, Lord Sibert," he said. "I was afraid that you might be out looking for us."

"Where are the others?" asked the man hoarsely. "My son —"

"He is safe," replied Giles, "or I have good reason to think that he is. I left him in Lichester Forest with Roger, for he had twisted his ankle badly. I came on to tell you what happened. Gurth was taken prisoner by Lord Gillies. I had climbed up a tree to get the lay of the ground before the enemy came upon us, so was not captured. We heard them say that they were going to make

an attack upon this castle very soon, perhaps tonight."

"But, what of Gurth?" asked Sibert.

"He escaped," replied Giles. "I met your son and some knights, and they have gone back to get both Roger and Gurth."

"You say that an attack will be made almost at once? Who said so?"

"Lord Gillies," replied Giles. "I heard him."

"We must make preparations," exclaimed Lord Sibert. "Warn the men-at-arms."

Giles laid his hand on Lord Sibert's arm.

"I've got something else to tell you," he said. "Lord Alford, Millicent's other uncle, has joined Lord Gillies in this attack on Lichester, with the understanding that if they conquer the castle Lady Millicent will be turned over to him."

"Lord Alford!" exclaimed Lord Sibert. "That hound! If I ever get my hands upon that villain's neck, I will pay him back for the harm he has done to my house. His brother was a fine man and, although he was our enemy also, for the two families have had differences for years, I respected him as a man. He won my sister in marriage, thus separating her from all her own family. But Alford killed his brother. His death killed my sister, so her death lays at Alford's door, as well. Not content with that, he drove my niece from her home. I hate him. I hate him more than I hate

Gillies, and if this coming siege gives me the chance to revenge myself on him, I shall welcome it."

"He is an awful man," replied Giles. "He nearly killed Anselm."

"Anselm," replied Sibert, in bewilderment. "Oh yes, to you Benedict is Anselm. H'm! By the way, after you have helped warn the men-at-arms, go to the big hall and wait for me."

The men-at-arms and pages eagerly clustered about Giles, keenly interested in the story he had to tell them. The fact that Gurth had taken Giles's command had spread among them, and they wanted to know whether the two had quarreled. Giles shook his head.

"We are friends," he said simply.

The men almost at once went to their various posts. The time for which they so long had planned was at last at hand, and there were many things to do. Now that the tension of the long exciting day was over, Giles suddenly found himself to be very tired. Remembering that Lord Sibert had told him to return to the great hall and, knowing that until Gurth and Roger were safely at home he could not think of resting, he slowly crossed the courtyard and pushed open the door of the hall.

The flickering light of the candles, for a moment, almost dazzled him, so he stood by the door

blinking. The Lady Millicent jumped from the arm of the chair which held a tall mail-clad figure with the joyful cry of, "Here he is, Uncle. Oh, I am so very glad!"

Giles blinked again, this time in disbelief. It couldn't be! Yes it was!

"Anselm!" he cried. "Oh, Anselm!"

Anselm threw his arms about the boy he loved so well, and for a moment held him very close while Millicent danced up and down around them. Explanations quickly followed. No one about the castle had told Anselm of the danger that Giles was in, hoping that the boy's return would make it unnecessary to frighten him. Anselm himself had just come to the castle. When he asked for Giles he had been told that the boy was on a mission for Lord Sibert.

"Did you know of the danger my boy was in?" asked Anselm of Millicent.

"Yes," she replied. "I was afraid you could read it upon my face, for I was so worried. I was told not to tell you."

"But what about you?" Giles asked. "How comes it that you are here at Lichester? I thought that you were getting money for King Richard."

"The money has been collected and it is on its way to Richard's captors. My work is done, and I am free now to return here and take up my work as my brother's helper."

"You will be fighting an old enemy if you do," said Giles. "Alford has come from Avalon to help Lord Gillies. I heard them planning together. If Lichester Castle falls, Lord Alford is to have the Lady Millicent turned over to him."

"Oh," cried out Millicent in distress. Her uncle's arm tightened around her, and his hand clenched at his side. Millicent clung to him. "I do feel so safe when you hold me like that," she said. "I am dreadfully afraid of him."

After Giles had told the whole story of Gurth's capture and escape, Anselm laughed rather grimly.

"Wouldn't Alford be surprised if he knew all that you had done to balk his plans?" he said. "It was you who led Millicent away from Rhywick Spring. It was you who heard Guilbert betray me to Alford, and warned me. You took her away from Avalon. Now you saved her by saving young Gurth. I'd enjoy letting him know what he owes to you, sometime."

For a while they sat there in the flickering candle-light. Giles refused to go to bed until word was brought from Gurth and Roger. At last they heard the squeak that told of the lowering of the drawbridge. They were out in the courtyard when the horses crossed the bridge. Both boys had been found easily, and there had been no trouble from that time on. Gurth had told them of the planned

attack, so they had stopped at Lichester Town to warn the people. Some of them had fled away to the forest on the other side of the town, while some had come with them to the castle to help in the defence.

Gurth and Roger were so tired that they could hardly keep awake on the trip, but it was destined to be an exciting, broken night, as far as sleep was concerned. Toward morning a great cry rose up from the men on guard. Lord Gillies's men, angered at finding their surprise not a surprise, had fired the town of Lichester. The thatched roofs of the cottages were very dry, for no rain had fallen for many days. They burned like so much tinder. Flames and showers of sparks! The scene was indescribable in its awfulness. A deep, menacing murmur rose from the men, women, and children standing on the battlement of the castle. Many of them were watching the destruction of their beloved homes, while others mourned for their friends exiled in the forest and forced to live like beasts. A white flame of indignation blazed in Giles's eyes as he thought of the destruction being done before his very eyes. Now he knew the real meaning and horror of war. No longer it seemed alluring. It was terrible.

Gurth came to his side and laid his hand upon Giles's arm.

"I should be in their hands to-night, if it were

not for you," he said soberly. "I might be being tortured. The people of Lichester would have been burned in their beds, there would have been a surprise attack on the castle itself, and it might have fallen into the enemy's hands. Giles, even although you were born a peasant, you have the courage and the wisdom of a knight, and I am going to tell my father so."

CHAPTER XXV

THE SIEGE

ALL the rest of that night the sky was reddened by the leaping flames of Lichester Town and, as darkness faded into dawn, blackened, smouldering ruins were all that was left upon the site of the once pretty little village. Not a house nor a barn remained standing, and the brisk wind that blew toward the castle brought the acrid smell of smoke to its defenders. No longer were those upon the wall in full sight from the outside, for the men of Lichester well knew that as soon as Lichester Town was ablaze, the men who set the fire would start out for the castle itself. However, while the wall might seem deserted to the enemy, such was not the case for, behind parapet and rampart, grim, and perfectly prepared for the coming fray, were the men of Lichester.

Before it was light, Lord Gillies's men were on their way to the castle. At dawn, those on the wall could see that the castle was completely surrounded by the enemy. No arrows, however, were shot at that time, for it was plain to be seen that the distance between the forces was farther than might be bridged by any arrow. There was nothing for those at the castle to do but to wait

patiently for further developments. The enemy must make the first move.

That such a move would be shortly made was quite evident from the bustle and confusion that might be noted in the enemy's camp. Men were hurrying to and fro, and there was the sound of shouts and hammering.

Giles, after a troubled, broken sleep, awoke very early. Every one about the castle seemed in a fever of unrest, and the place buzzed like a huge beehive. What seemed all confusion, however, was but systematized work, for each man had his own task and was busy at it. At Anselm's suggestion, the work had been divided among one-half of the castle men. The other half rested during the time when the first half worked. At the end of a certain period of time, the first half rested while the second half worked. Huge rocks were being carried to the top of the wall where they were stored behind the rampart, in order that, when the enemy made its attack, there would be plenty of ammunition on hand to meet it.

Giles, making his way to the wall, began to ascend it at a place where he could get a good view of both Lichester Town and the enemy's camp. At the top of the wall he found old Ralph, busy storing away the piles of rock which were being handed up to him.

"Stay behind the ramparts, Giles of the Star,"

warned the old man, "for all they look to be so busy down there, there are some who have their eyes upon the castle, and there is no need of our risking ourselves unnecessarily. Lichester will have need of all her men and boys before this siege comes to a close."

"What are the men of Lord Gillies doing?" asked the boy eagerly.

Old Ralph looked very grim. Then, very cautiously, he peered around one edge of the parapet, dodging hastily backward as half a dozen arrows rattled against it.

"They seem to be shooting;" said the old man dryly, as he pulled one of the arrows from his sleeve. It had barely missed piercing his arm.

"I rather think it would be wiser for me to wear armor if I am to make observations," he said. "It is easier to pile stones when not weighted down by metal."

"What did you see?" asked the boy.

"You've never been in a siege, lad," he replied, after a long hesitation. "You have no idea what it means. Often the enemy encircles a castle and literally starves the inmates of it into surrender. That is the easiest way, for then there is no loss of blood, and that is the method that Lord Gillies would ordinarily take, for Lichester Castle is a hard castle to seize, but Gillies is more for John than for Richard, while Lord Sibert and all of

those of Lichester—Benedict and the Lady Evelyn, the little Lady Millicent's mother—have been loyal and helpful to King Richard's cause. It is now well-known that money has been collected to pay off the ransom exacted by the German king, and that Richard will soon be in England. Therefore, if Gillies would take the castle of Lichester, he must do so quickly for, with Richard in England, it would be impossible."

"You mean," broke in Giles suddenly, "that instead of a long siege there will be a sudden attack?"

"Yes," replied Ralph. "It will be a furious attack, and the moat will be red with blood."

"But how will they do it?" questioned the boy with a little shiver.

"There are various ways," replied Ralph with a shake of his head. "First, they will fill up the moat so they may draw near to the castle to batter down the walls or doors. While they are doing that, we will hurl stones and arrows upon them to drive them back, but they will persevere until the moat is filled. Oh, I could tell you much about sieges, but my work must be done."

With that he turned away and began to pile up his rocks, leaving Giles feeling both depressed and worried. Thinking there would be work for him below, he descended the wall and went to awaken Roger. There was no need of this, however, for

both Roger and Gurth were just crossing the court-yard as he reached the bottom of the wall. He was not slow in telling them what he had learned from Ralph.

"He is right," replied Roger. "I know, for I was in a siege once. I was not very old so I do not remember it well, but it was in that siege that I lost both father and mother. All I remember was the most dreadful of noises and the crumbling of the wall. I was then brought here by the man-at-arms who rescued me."

All that day preparations went on, both within and without the castle. The first real bit of fighting came at about noon. True to Ralph's prophecy, the first move the enemy made was to roll up stones and to throw them into the moat. Word came down from the guard on the wall that the enemy seemed to find it difficult to procure stones.

"It is because all the loose ones have been brought into the castle for munition," laughed Gurth. "They will have a fine time combing the countryside for rocks."

"They'll get stuff somehow," replied Giles. "Look! The archers are getting ready to let fly at them." The volley of arrows was followed by a cheer from the men on the wall, and two shrieks of pain showed that the shots had told. However, the enemy did not seem to be discouraged by their loss, for both the filling process and shooting of

arrows went steadily on. By nightfall none had been lost on the castle side, while five had been killed of those engaged in filling the moat, but a good start had been made toward making a dry passage to the castle walls.

The second day of the siege was a repetition of the first. Several of the enemy lost their lives or were wounded grievously, yet at the close of the day even more of the moat was filled. It was very plain to those on the castle wall that, at the rate of speed with which the moat was being filled, it would not be long before the enemy would be able to walk across it dry-shod. From the wall could be seen a strange wooden structure, day by day growing in size until it was about the height of the wall, or perhaps a little higher. This was looked upon darkly by the men of Lichester, for well they knew its purpose.

"What is it for?" asked Giles of Roger, for many of the preparations were new to the boy from Avalon.

"It is a tower," he explained. "It is built on rollers so they will be able to roll it easily up to the wall of the castle when the moat is filled in. The enemy are at the top of it and, when it gets up to the wall, they come out the side and fight with the men on the wall. It is a very dangerous thing."

"Why don't we set it on fire when it is moved up?" asked Giles, eying the wooden affair with

interest through one of the loopholes in the parapet.

"It isn't finished yet," replied Gurth, who had just joined them. "It will be covered with plates of metal. Not even Greek fire will be able to harm it when it is finished."

Giles knew what Greek fire was, or at least he knew what it was for, because Anselm had told him, when a barrel of the stuff was taken to the top of the wall.

"In olden times," he had explained, "knights built their castles of wood. It was not easy to defend such a castle for, if the enemy could draw near to it, they could set it on fire. Now men know how to mix certain ingredients together to make a terrible kind of fire which, once it is hurled at a thing, will stick to it and burn. This Greek fire is used to set fire to the towers and other burnable structures of the enemy."

Barrels of oil were brought out where they would be handy for heating to the boiling point, when the enemy should at last stand below the castle walls. It seemed a terrible way to fight, and yet it was the method of the day and they were fighting for their home.

Meanwhile, the women of the castle were not idle, for it was the women who cared for the injured and nursed them back to health. Yet, busy as every one was, it was all in preparation. Each

knew that the time of war, bloodshed, furious hand-to-hand struggle, was coming, and coming soon.

Giles and the other pages had no time for mock battles now, for they were kept continually on the run, carrying water to the men on the walls, running errands for any one who might call upon their services, and helping in all ways within their power. Giles and Roger were together most of the time, but another had been allowed to come into their friendship. Instead of two boys, working side by side, there were three, for at last Gurth saw his old, bragging, disagreeable nature in its true light and, having seen and disapproved of himself, being a thoughtful boy with more brains than one would have supposed from his former behavior, he at once started to rectify matters. The new Gurth was so desirable as a friend that even Roger, who had been the butt of many of Gurth's tricks, forgave and accepted him into the friendship.

At last the moat was filled in, despite the hail of stones and fire which was dropped upon the heads of those engaged in the work, and the huge tower was slowly dragged forward. During all this time those on the castle wall were not idle. As soon as the tower was within arrow-shot it became the target of the castle archers, but their efforts were in vain, for the wooden walls reënforced with wet

hides and metal plates protected those who were within and, although the terrible Greek fire which was poured down upon those below injured many, yet more always took their places.

"The fight will be on the walls to-morrow," said Lord Sibert heavily. "I have ordered my best men to withstand the attack."

He was talking to Anselm in the great hall of the castle. No one else, with the exception of the Lady Constance, was in the room. She had been busy with basin and bandages, binding up a jagged wound in her husband's leg, and her face was sad and her eyes weary.

"Do you want me on the wall?" asked Anselm.

"No," replied Lord Sibert. "I have other and more important work for you, my brother."

"I will do whatever will best help you, Sibert," replied Anselm. "I promise it on the Book."

His brother looked at him earnestly. They had not always agreed in times past, for Sibert had not approved of his sister's marriage to the young Lord Giles of Avalon and had shown this disapproval by refusing to have anything more to do with her. Benedict or, as most people now called him, Anselm, had seen that in spite of whatever quarrels had been between the two families in the past the young lord loved his sister, had not turned against her. Instead, he had followed her to Avalon that he might serve her and her child. Yes, Anselm

was trustworthy and could be depended upon. He had shown this characteristic over and over again.

"I know that I can trust you," said Sibert gravely. "I can trust you, for you are trustworthy. No man can tell how the battle of to-morrow will turn. It may be that my men will be unable to drive back those of Lord Gillies for they are good fighters, and the matter is one of utmost importance to their leaders. If we lose to-morrow, all of the family will be killed. If the battle turns against us I want you to be in readiness to take Lady Constance, my two sons, and the Lady Millicent, through the secret tunnel and hide them away from the men of Lord Alford and Lord Gillies. As for me, I will fight to the bitter end, but I must know that they are in safe hands. When the king returns, go to him with them and tell him that, before I died, I commended them to his care. Will you swear to do this?"

"With one condition," replied Anselm.

"And that?" questioned Lord Sibert in surprise.

"My condition is that Giles may accompany the others," answered Anselm. "There are certain of Lord Alford's men, notably one called Guilbert, who know the boy well. They know that it was he who helped Millicent to escape, and if he should fall into their hands it would go hard with him, for Alford is not one who forgets or forgives."

"It shall be as you say," replied the other. "I forgot the lad when I spoke. The other pages will be safe, for they are all sons of important knights whom it is not safe to annoy. Lord Gillies will not hurt any of them. It is only the family of Lichester that is in danger. My brother, I trust you."

"I will not betray that trust," replied Anselm. "I swear by all that is holy that I will give my life, if need be, for the life of any one of those who go with me."

CHAPTER XXVI

GILES'S OPPORTUNITY

IN spite of the continuous preparation which had been going on for the past fortnight, there was very little let-up just before the battle. One thing Anselm insisted upon. Those who were to engage in the actual fighting on the morrow must spend the night in rest. Lord Sibert's wound proved more dangerous than was expected. That night he had a fever and raved wildly of filled moats, a broken wall, and rivers of blood. Lady Constance was up all night caring for him, and her face became more worn and haggard with the passing of each hour.

Anselm took charge in his brother's place. Shortly after his interview with Lord Sibert, he called together the oldest and wisest of the men-at-arms and knights, that he might get their advice and make known to them his plans. It was a grave-faced group of men that gathered that night in the hall, for all were worn by anxious hours of waiting and fatiguing work. The future looked very dark to them, for each knew that this might be his last night to live. Anselm's heart sank as he looked about the weary circle.

"You must get sleep to-night," he said. "We

can't help but look on matters differently if we are well rested."

"The walls must be guarded," said one man gloomily. "It will take a number of us to keep the fire burning under the oil. All must be in readiness for the attack to-morrow morning."

"I feel that the attack will be as soon as there is a ray of light in the eastern sky," said Ralph.

"The men need sleep," replied Anselm. "They will be fit for little if they do not gain the rest they need."

Several of the pages were in the hall. Although they were not of the circle of men, they could hear what was being said and were all keenly interested in the conversation. Giles was sitting with Roger, Gurth, and young Sibert. Although it was long past their regular bedtime, sleep was far from their minds.

"When I am a man and have a castle, I shall have meetings like this and make wonderful plans," whispered Roger to Giles.

"I can never have a castle," replied Giles sadly. "I don't so much care about a castle, but it is dreadful to know that, try as hard as I can to be worthy of real knighthood, I can never really belong to it as you and Lord Sibert belong. I was born a peasant, and to be born a peasant is to be born for lowness. I can till the fields, raising my grain for the use of an overlord in times of

trouble like this, or I can be a humble soldier, but I want more. I want to be a knight who has something to do with the planning of a defense or an attack against an enemy."

His friends looked at him curiously, for it was a new thing to hear Giles, who had been so radiantly happy since entering the service of Lord Sibert, complaining about his lot, and he flushed under their look.

"Yet you are treated exactly as are the other pages," said Sibert.

"Yes," replied Giles. "It has been wonderful to be here. At first, I felt as if I were an intruder who had no real right, but every one has been so good to me that I now feel as if I really belonged here as one of you. I think that is what hurts most of all. I feel as if I belong, and yet I know that I have no right to what I am getting."

"You are one of us by nature, if not by blood," said Sibert seriously. "We never think of you as a peasant now, Giles. You do not seem like one. I heard my mother say that you had neither the look nor the speech of a peasant lad, and I know that my cousin, the Lady Millicent, regards you as a friend. Do you know anything about yourself? Who were your parents, and how came it that they gave you into my uncle's hands?"

"Who they were, I do not know," replied Giles. "Anslem tells me that both of them are dead. I

have often wondered about them. I wonder where they lived and what they looked like. It seems strange that both of them should die, for Anselm told me that they were very young, but more than that he would not say."

"It seems strange," mused Roger, looking sharply at Giles and noting his finely-cut features and slim, sensitive hands. "He is more of a knight now than Anstruther will ever be," he thought to himself. "Perhaps he is not such a common boy as he thinks he is. It seems queer that Anselm would take in a common peasant. I wonder —"

Meanwhile, the conversation among the men had continued. Some of them, including Anselm, felt that the men should be relieved from as much duty during the night as possible, while others felt that the work was more important than the rest.

"There is much to be done," protested one of them. "The fuel must be fed to the fire under the kettles of oil and a watch must be kept upon the walls. A number of our men have been wounded sorely, and are of no use in the defense which may be necessary at any moment."

During this speech Giles edged up closer to Anselm, not wishing to miss anything of importance which might be said. He hoped that he could be of some aid, but he knew that the older men would scoff at such an idea. Still there ought to be something that boys could do, for, although the men

would probably not entrust them with an important place on the wall, their eyes were keen, and their ears quick to hear the slightest sound. At least they were old enough and responsible enough to keep the fires under the oil. It would be dreadful to interrupt their conversation, but he felt that he must pass the idea on to some one.

Leaning over, he whispered his plan to Sibert.

"Why couldn't we boys mind the fires and help out on the wall," he said. "We have been running errands ever since the siege started, but we have not worked as hard as the men have, and we have had more sleep."

Sibert listened thoughtfully, then nodded. As soon as there was a lull in the conversation, he told of Giles's plan. The younger boy's heart gave a thrill of pleasure when Sibert explained that it was his plan.

After more conversation in the nature of an argument, for several of the older men felt that the boys were too young for such responsibility, it was decided that they might keep the fires burning and relieve half of the men who were acting as sentinels on the wall.

"There will be more of the older men there to see that all is well," said Anselm, "and I should not be surprised if the boys would be useful, for their eyes are sharp and their ears keen."

After Roger and Gurth had called together the

rest of the pages, it was a highly delighted group of boys that gathered about Anselm, waiting for his instructions. At last, they were to be given a position of trust. Running errands was all very well and helpful, but it was boy's work. To actually help in the preparation for the coming battle, and to be a guard with men on the wall was the work of a man. Such a thing was unheard-of, and several of the older men shook their heads over it gravely.

"Better put two boys together on the wall," suggested Ralph. "Two boys will keep each other awake."

A little later, Giles and Gurth left the big hall together and ascended the wall in silence. The night was dark for the moon had not yet risen, and small clouds of mist obscured the stars. A soft, gentle wind ruffled their hair and whispered about the corner of the rampart, but otherwise the night was still, save for the whirr of insects outside the castle wall.

Ralph and several of the men who were too old to be valuable fighters were also on the wall, as well as the younger boys. Although Giles could not see him, he knew that Ralph was not far away to his right and Andrew, another of the older men, was around the corner to the left. It was rather reassuring to know that they were there, but each of the boys knew that he was responsible for

the section of wall between the two older men, and must not rely on any one else.

"The wind is in our favor," whispered Gurth, holding up his hand that the wind might blow against it. "It will bring every sound to our ears, and whatever noise we make will not reach them."

They did not talk much as, in the deep silence about them, conversation seemed out of place. Every now and then one of them would walk the length of the wall listening intently for any sound from below, but there were no sounds except the soft night noises. It was not late, although it seemed ages since they first mounted the wall. Most of the men from the other camp seemed to be asleep, too, for there were very few fires burning. As they looked over the rampart they could see one fire that seemed to burn more brightly than any of the others.

"That must be their council," said Giles. "They are sitting up late making their plans."

"It seems strange," replied Gurth with a little shiver. "To-night everything is so quiet and peaceful, and to-morrow, probably at daybreak when the attack begins, there will be shrieks of pain, the rattle of armor, and fire everywhere."

"Winning costs so much in life and loss of property," replied Giles.

"Losing costs even more," replied Gurth.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could win

without the loss of so much," said Giles thoughtfully. "Anselm says that whenever an attack is made from a tower many lives are lost on both sides. He told me that the men come out of the towers in a body, and that the wall is so narrow that only a few of the castle men can fight upon it well. I wish we could know how things will turn out by this time to-morrow."

"Wouldn't it be grand if we could think of a way to get the best of them without so much loss to our side?" suggested Gurth dreamily.

Giles sat up suddenly. This was a new idea.

"Do you mean you wish that you and I could think up a plan?" he wanted to know.

"I was thinking of our men. I don't suppose boys could make a good enough plan for them to listen to," answered Gurth, yawning widely.

"I wonder," replied Giles, and again there was silence. With his arms wrapped about his knees and his head upon them he sat very silent, thinking deeply. Ever since he was a very small boy he had longed to do something big to show that he was worthy of knighthood. He had longed to do something to show his gratitude to Anselm who had done so much for him, and to Lord Sibert who had given him a chance to enter service as a page. Now Lord Sibert was wounded and in so much pain that he could not take command, and Anselm had never defended a besieged castle.

"If only I could think out a plan by which we might win," he thought. Gurth yawned again, this time so widely that it attracted Giles's attention. "Why don't you go to sleep?" he suggested. "I'll stay awake and keep watch. Later I will wake you, and you may watch while I sleep."

Gurth stretched out upon the hard stone wall and pillow'd his head on his arm. Soon he was asleep, leaving Giles very much awake with his new idea in his head.

"If I could only think of a plan," he mused. He walked along the wall and ascertained that both Ralph and Andrew were awake.

"We must not let them surprise us," said Ralph stretching himself. "A surprise would be fatal."

A surprise! A surprise would be fatal! If a surprise would be fatal to the castle folk, would it not be equally fatal to the enemy? Would it not be possible to think up some plan of surprising them and of throwing them into confusion? Why should they wait quietly until the enemy attacked them? Would it not be better to carry a surprise attack into the camp of the enemy? Naturally, the two leaders would have constant watch kept on the castle and, at the first sign of life from it, the whole enemy's camp would be in readiness to meet any hostility. It would be impossible to lower the drawbridge and lift the portcullis for, quietly as they might do it, warning would be given to the

other camp. If there was a way to leave the castle secretly and get around the enemy, an attack might be made upon them from the rear. Then, like a flash, came the memory of the secret passage through which Gurth had led him. The other end of that passage was in an old, ruined building hidden securely away in the swamp. In all probability there would be none of Lord Gillies's men in the swamp, for it was a dangerous place to one not accustomed to its deep morasses and obscure paths. Why would it not be possible for Anselm to take a group of men through the secret passage and, under the cover of darkness, close in upon the enemy?

Without saying anything to Ralph about his plan, because he knew that the old man was very cautious and not open to new suggestions, Giles returned to the sleeping Gurth and shook him.

"What's the matter?" muttered Gurth, sitting up and rubbing his eyes. Then the realization of what his being aroused might mean came to him and he spoke quickly, "Is it time for me to watch? Did you hear anything?"

"No, I have heard nothing, but I have an idea that I want to tell you about," replied Giles reassuringly. Then, in low tones, he laid out his plan to his appreciative friend.

"It is a fine thought," exclaimed Gurth. "You go to Anselm and tell him, and I will stay here

on guard!" Giles quickly made his way to the courtyard below, where he found all the other pages sitting about the huge kettles of hot oil. The fires were burning briskly, and lighted up the gloom of the night. By the light of this fire Giles could see to cross to the inner wall, and from there he soon made his way to the castle building itself.

All of the men were asleep. Clad in their mail armor they presented a strange appearance. It looked very uncomfortable but it was necessary, for they must be ready at a moment's warning. When he reached his friend's side he hesitated for a moment, wondering what would be the best way to put his plan into words. It would be hard for Anselm, aroused from a sound sleep, to at once put his attention favorably upon a new plan. As he stood there the man's eyes opened for, instead of sleeping, he had been lying motionless thinking and planning for the morrow. Giles laid his finger upon his lips and motioned to Anselm to follow him. Without a question the man arose and, as silently as ghosts, they stole out of the courtyard, not speaking until they reached the well-curb.

"What is it, Giles?" asked the man gravely. Giles hesitated. What had seemed a brilliant plan to him might be considered silly to an older and wiser man.

"When Gurth and I left the castle the other day he took me through a secret passage that led out of the chapel. I do not know where the doorway is, for he blindfolded me, but I do know where we came out, for he could not conceal that. It was in the swamp. You probably know all about that."

"I know of the passage," replied Anselm. "If we are overcome I planned to escape that way with the various members of the family."

"Well, I have a plan that I wanted to tell you about," continued Giles. "I thought that if you could take a group of men out of the castle and around the enemy you could catch them between two parts of our soldiers. They don't expect any attack from us. They think they have us trapped. You could go through the secret passage and, led by some one who knew the way, cross the swamp, coming upon them from the rear."

Giles looked up at the man by his side. It was lighter now, for the moon had risen, so Giles could see the dim outline of the man's face. It was set and stern, and from its expression Giles could not tell whether his plan was favorably accepted. He waited anxiously, yet without interrupting. At last Anselm spoke.

"It is a good plan," he said slowly. "If we could be sure that our force of men was sufficient. I do not care to make the decision unadvised by

those who have had more experience in sieges than I have had. Come, lad, we will go into the hall and tell the other knights of the plan!"

Giles's heart gave a throb of gratitude as he listened to Anselm proposing his plan to the other knights, for the man told them frankly that it was to Giles that they owed the idea. Most of the younger men about the castle were strongly in favor of such a plan and were anxious to be among the attacking force. It was decided that Anselm should be in charge of the group that left the castle, and that Ralph should command those left behind.

"We will have to leave almost at once," said Anselm, after naming the men who were to leave, "but before I go there are certain things that I wish to tell you, Giles."

He drew the boy aside, both out of sight and hearing of any of the knights and pages. Then he drew from his bosom the same small roll of paper that Giles had carried in safety from Avalon to Lichester, and handed it to Giles.

"It is more than possible that I may never return to Lichester Castle," he said, laying his hand upon the boy's shoulder. "In case I am killed or taken prisoner, there is a mission that I want you to undertake for me. This packet must be taken to King Richard. You know its importance although you do not know its contents. Guard it with your life. There is another mission as well.

The Lady Constance, young Sibert, and Gurth are to flee if the castle falls into the enemy's hands. To your care, I leave Millicent. She is to be your responsibility. Take her and the packet to the king. I can trust him to do the right thing by you both."

"I think I should die if anything happened to you," replied Giles. "You have been like a father to me."

"I have loved you like a son," answered Anselm earnestly. "Therefore, I know that I can trust you to complete my work in case anything happens to me."

"I will do as you say," replied Giles.

"Come with me, then, that I may show you the secret spring," replied the man, and that was the very last word he said to Giles until the moment of parting came. Giles never forgot that parting. In the faint flickering light of the torches the bare, gray rock walls looked grimmer than usual. Everything seemed grim, for the faces of the knights were set and stern. They were taking a desperate chance yet, if they could make the move a success, the lives of many would be saved.

"Boys, I trust you," said Anselm. "Sibert, I entrust your mother and brother to you. Remember that the first move of Lord Gillies will be to kill all of your family. Giles, to you I leave the Lady Millicent."

"We will not fail you," replied Sibert simply.

In another moment they were gone.

The actual fighting is not the hardest thing to do in case of a battle. Many people have approached a skirmish in fear and trembling, only to prove themselves heroes when it came to the actual fighting. Sometimes the hardest thing of all is the anxious waiting for something to happen. As soon as the secret panel slipped back into position, Giles returned to his post on the wall. Time went by slowly. Giles was in a fever of anxiety. Somewhere out in the dark quiet of the night, Anselm with his followers was slipping nearer and nearer to the unsuspecting enemy. Giles wondered where they were, and whether all things were going as they had hoped. He knew there would be a big outcry from the enemy, and it was for this outcry that the boy lying in tense silence waited. Yet only the soft sleepy noises of the night came to his ears.

It grew later and later, each moment seeming an eternity to the anxious boy. Perhaps something had happened to Anselm and the other knights. Giles shivered at this thought, for if Anselm was hurt in this undertaking the boy felt that it would be in a large measure his fault, for had he not been the one to suggest the plan? He had wanted to go with the knights that he might be with Anselm in time of danger, but that was impossible for he had been given a task to perform. He slipped his hand

into his bosom to feel for the safety of the packet, then settled back with a sigh of relief. He did not know its contents, it is true, but he did know that Anselm attached much importance to it and that until it was back in Anselm's possession or handed to King Richard of England, he must not relax his vigilance for its safety.

Still, nothing happened. Surely it must be drawing on toward dawn, for the night had seemed ages long. It seemed as if those in the attacking force had had more than enough time to reach their destination, yet the silence could be felt. Below him in the courtyard he could see the men hurrying about in the light of the fires, and he knew that they were busy making final preparations for the attack. In case Anselm failed, the safety of those in the castle would lie in these men's hands. More time dragged by.

Giles began to wonder what would happen to him and to the Lady Millicent if the siege held defeat for Lichester. He could not imagine a life in which Anselm held no part. If anything happened to Anselm he would lose not only his hero, but his best friend as well. He wondered what his life would have been if Anselm had not taken him in the first place. It seemed strange that a knight like Anselm was willing to bother with a helpless baby, moreover, a peasant baby who had been brought to him in a market-basket covered by a

linen towel, and yet it had also seemed strange that Anselm had chosen to live in a secret cave on the mountainside for so long. Giles now knew that it had been for the sake of the Lady Millicent, that he might watch over his sister's child and keep her from all harm, but why should such a man take a baby boy? Where had Nanny, Millicent's old nurse, found the baby whom she had brought to Anselm in a market-basket? Whose baby was it? What had happened to its father and mother? And still the silence of the enemy's camp lay unbroken. Where was Anselm?

CHAPTER XXVII

DAWN

FLICKERING torches lit up the dark underground passage and cast weird shadows of ghostly warriors upon the walls. The sound of their own steps, muffled and dully reëchoing, was appalling. Darkness has always seemed an enemy of men. Anselm and his men passed through the gloomy tunnel and out into the clammy murkiness of the old ruin in the swamp. Strong hearts shrank from the mysterious and unfamiliar gloom of the room into which they came at its end, for strange lights had been seen previously in the vicinity of the old tower, and repute had it that the place was haunted by the spirits of the dead. Only desperation would have induced those men to enter upon such an adventure.

The walls of the cell-like room into which they came were made of granite blocks. The water which had seeped in and run down the sides of the wall made the whole place damp. Green lichens grew upon the wall. As they crossed the floor a large rat ran across their path and scurried into a hole in the wall. It was with a feeling of relief that they left the ruin for the open air.

One of the villagers, who had stood on the wall of Lichester watching the flames of the enemy destroy his beloved home, was their guide. He professed to know every path and byway the swamp contained, and black hatred in his heart for the enemy who had robbed him of home urged him on. They went slowly, for a single misstep to either left or right might have meant falling into water and mud neck deep, where, weighted down as they were by pounds of metal, rescue would be difficult, if not absolutely impossible.

The swamp was dark and dreary. Fortunately for the success of the undertaking it was late summer rather than early spring, for dry weather had lowered the level of the pools of water, making it possible for them to cross in safety. During the spring months to cross it during the day would be difficult, and at night utterly impossible. Although the moon had risen and was nearly full, the overhanging branches of trees shut out its light.

For nearly half a mile they crept cautiously on, in single file. At last, coming to a slight rise in the land, they left the muck and mire of the quagmire for the safer, drier wooded hill beyond. Here Anselm called a halt. Leaving most of his men stretched at full length on the ground, he ascended the hill to a place of vantage from which he could see the glowing embers of the enemy's camp. All seemed quiet, but Anselm was not to

be deceived by appearances. Well he knew that guards watched over the safety of the sleeping camp and, although all seemed quiet and sleeping, there were watchful eyes alert to see and keen ears listening for the slightest sound.

Anselm fingered the hilt of his sword. His enemy was lying asleep in one of the tents of the foe. The time had come when the last struggle between the two would take place. Up to now most of the advantage had seemed to be with Alford. In the first encounter between the two men Anselm had been left in the road for dead. While Anselm was lying there unconscious, Alford had murdered his own brother, the Lady Millicent's father. Even later, Millicent herself had been forced to flee from her wicked uncle. Up to now Alford had been the winner. Anselm shut his teeth together grimly. Alford had had things his own way altogether too long. It should be Anselm's turn now.

"Oh, if I can only get him alive," thought the man. "There is much that I would have him know."

Having ascertained the direction of the camp and having made a comprehensive note of the easiest way to get there, he returned to his comrades. In low, guarded tones he told them what he had seen and outlined to them his plan.

"We will spread out at first, coming out upon

them from as many directions as possible," he whispered. "Until the attack is made be silent, but when the signal is given fall upon them with shouts of victory. We want to confuse them. Let the first attack be scattered. Then close in about the tent of Lord Gillies. Once he is taken, our position is safe."

For some time they waited. It was nearly dawn. All about them were the rustle of leaves in the breeze and the whirr of the little night insects. No noise came to them from the enemy's camp. All seemed hushed and quiet.

At last Anselm called his men together for final directions. The time was at hand. To the summit of the hill they climbed, then down over the other side. The wind that had favored the boys at watch on the castle wall earlier that evening was decidedly against Anselm and his men. Any little noise that might be made by any one of them would be blown to the ears of the men on watch.

Nearer and nearer they crept, yet still there was no sign of life from the sleeping camp. Following Anselm's directions they separated in order that they might approach from as many sides as possible. Anselm himself with two others made his way toward the place where the largest of the fires glowed dimly. It was here where he expected to find the two men who were his enemies. He was nearly there when a stick cracked beneath

the feet of one of his men. The man fell heavily with a smothered oath and, in a moment, the sharp cry of one of the men on guard aroused the sleeping camp.

There were startled exclamations followed by the ringing shouts of Anselm's men as they charged down upon their half-awake foes. The advantage, however, was not entirely upon Anselm's side for the enemy numbered three to their one, but roused up from a sound sleep to find one's foe making an attack is confusing, to say the least. Like Anselm's men they were fully armed, that they might be ready in case of any emergency.

There was the clang of steel against steel as sword met sword. Shouts of exultation mingled with groans of pain. In the dim light, fighting back and forth, it was hard to tell enemy from friend. Men fell only to struggle with difficulty to their feet, weighed down as they were with their armor. When the alarm was given Anselm rushed ahead of the others to the largest of the tents. Knocking down the men who seemed to spring up at his feet like magic he pushed aside the cloth doorway of the tent, calling loudly to those within.

"Alford of Avalon," he shouted, "I bid you come forth and fight this matter out with me."

Lord Alford, startled and bewildered, came out of the doorway.

"And who are you?" he replied huskily, al-

though he recognized the voice that he had not heard for more than a dozen years. In that flash of time he seemed to realize that the fate, which he had feared since learning that the blow he had struck at Anselm years before had not been a fatal one, was upon him. Even more than he had hoped to regain the little Lady Millicent had he hoped to down his enemy forever, to see the entire family of Lichester wiped out. And now the time had come when he and his enemy stood face to face, but he was unarmed. In the hasty manner in which he had been aroused from slumber he had not taken his sword.

Anselm threw the door open wider so the light of the fire just outside the tent shone in, lighting the interior dimly. A single glance showed him the condition of spirit Alford was in. To have attacked and killed him then and there would have been an easy matter, but it wasn't Anselm's way to take advantage of one who was down, even if that one was the man who had ruined his life. A glance about the tent showed the location of Alford's sword and also a flagon of wine. Anselm lifted the latter and handed it to Alford.

"Drink," he said curtly. Without a word Alford raised the flagon to his lips and drank. While he was doing this Anselm went to the place where he had seen Alford's sword and brought it back to the lightest part of the space. Outside, the battle

still raged furiously, and neither the grim-faced, watching Anselm nor the sullen, brooding Alford could tell by the noise which side was winning. When the last drop of the wine had been drained Anselm sent Alford's sword flying through the air toward him. The point of it was embedded in the dirt floor where it stood upright, glittering evilly in the light of the fire.

The wine had cleared Alford's head. A savage light came into his face as he laid hold of his sword. Sword clashed against sword. Like two savage creatures they fought, Anselm to avenge the wrong that had been done to him and his, Alford for life and hate. Anselm's mind flashed back to the dozen years before, when he and this man had fought and he had been downed. He had been a mere stripling then, and that had been his first real battle. Then it had been man against boy and the man, by reason of his greater strength, had won.

Things were different now. Anselm was a man with all a healthy, young man's strength. His life on the open hillside, with the rigid training that he had laid out for himself, had turned his muscles into steel bands, while Alford's love of luxury was beginning to tell against him. A prettier bit of sword-play would have been difficult to find, for both men were noted for their ability. There, in the dim light of the flickering fire, they struggled,

keen of eye and quick of hand. For minutes they fought, neither gaining the advantage.

In the midst of the struggle a soldier of Lichester sprang into the tent.

"They are gaining upon us," he cried excitedly.
"They are on their way here now."

Alford laughed sardonically.

"Your usual luck still holds good, O man of Lichester," he sneered. "I have always won against you and I shall win this time."

"They come!" gasped the man-at-arms. "They will trap you here."

"Hold the door against them," snapped Anselm.

The blood-stained face of the man-at-arms whitened at this command, for he was but one against many, but without thought of disobedience he stationed himself by the doorway, just in time to stop the rush of two of Lord Gillies's men. The situation was critical for, by the sound from outside, Anselm could tell that the fighting was getting nearer and, if possible, fiercer. Something must be done at once for he could see that the man on guard was hard pressed. More fiercely than ever did he return Alford's charge, but his enemy was fighting well, too. He realized that help would come if he could but hold Anselm off a little longer.

There was a shout from the doorway. Anselm could see that the man-at-arms had been forced to

his knees and, although he was still pluckily endeavoring to hold back the foe, his chances of doing so amounted to little. It was time to bring things to a close. A clever twist of the wrist, the same old trick, followed by a lunge of the sword and his enemy lay bleeding on the ground. Then Anselm turned to face the newcomers.

More men came up, both friends and enemies, and the hottest part of the battle raged about the tent of the wounded Alford of Avalon. First one side seemed to be gaining, then another. Unhampered by suits of mail the villagers of Lichester were able to move about much more easily than the armor-clad knights but, on the other hand, they were not so well protected.

“Capture Gillies,” shouted Anselm, above the din of the battle.

Night was giving way to dawn. Faint gray dawn it was, just streaked with light along the eastern horizon. The blazing of the enemies’ tents showed that the villagers had not forgotten Lichester Town. In the grim light of burning tents the men of Lichester looked for Lord Gillies. His plump little figure was nowhere visible, but at length a keen-eyed villager beheld something moving in a clump of bushes. Upon investigating, Lord Gillies was discovered in hiding. When it came to making a fine tower in which other men were to fight Gillies stood supreme, but when it

came to actual fighting he preferred to view matters from a bramble-bush. That ended the fight for, fearing instantaneous death, Gillies at once called off his men, bidding them to surrender.

Just as the sun arose in the east the big drawbridge of Lichester was lowered for the triumphant little body of men-at-arms with a bloody, disheveled Anselm at their head. Securely bound and expostulating vehemently was a red-faced, angry little Lord Gillies. There was no scratch or blemish upon him, for he had been careful to look out for his skin. In a rude litter, moaning faintly and delirious, lay Lord Alford of Avalon.

At the gate of the inner courtyard stood the cheering women of the castle with pages and squires. Millicent's eyes widened as she saw her Uncle Alford's white face and blood-stained garb. Then her eyes turned to Uncle Anselm. His clothing was blood-stained as well, but the light of victory shone in his eyes. They were like blue flames. His quest was nearly at an end. He had turned the defeat of years into victory, and the victory was sweet.

Straight to the inner hall he went to find Lord Sibert. Both the Lady Constance and Giles accompanied him there. Lord Sibert was still faint from loss of blood, but his mind was clear, and joy is a wonderful healer. Kneeling by his brother's side Anselm rendered an account of all

that had happened during the night, not forgetting to give Giles the credit of having suggested the plan.

"I bring you back a prisoner," he said, in finishing. "Gillies is bound securely and is in your dungeon, but I have one request to make."

"And that?" asked Sibert.

"Alford is my prisoner," continued Anselm. "My request is that he be left to me."

"It shall be so," replied Sibert.

CHAPTER XXVIII

GILES OF AVALON

LICESTER rejoiced. Its enemies were safely bound and imprisoned in its damp, underground dungeon. Lord Gillies would never again be the thorn in Lord Sibert's flesh. Where he had expected failure was brilliant success. The cloud which had overhung the future of the little Lady of Avalon had been lifted. All this had been accomplished through the success of Anselm's night attack upon the camp of the enemy.

Had this attack proved a failure, Giles would have been miserably unhappy, for he would have felt that as he had suggested the plan blame was upon his shoulders, but the plan had not proved a failure. Beyond all hope it had been successful and, consequently, Giles was radiantly happy. No longer was he looked upon as a simple peasant lad, lifted out of his natural station of life. He had proved his worth, for all this joy that pervaded the castle was the result of the masterly carrying out of his plan. At last, in some measure, he had been able to repay Anselm for the love which he had lavished upon him, as well as to render service to Lord Sibert for taking him into his castle as a page.

No longer was he called the peasant boy of Avalon. The name, Giles of the Star, was more and more frequently upon the lips of those about the castle. Millicent was very happy over all this for she felt that, whereas Giles had sworn fealty to her and had come to Lichester Castle in her service, in some measure he was bound to her and was her property. Her feeling for him was one of deep affection, and the sneers of the young ladies of the castle as to her interest in a common peasant boy had been hard to bear.

All the folk of the castle rejoiced, and great was the celebration at the lifting of the siege. Such a feast had never before graced the dinner-boards of the castle. Never had such delicious food been more abundantly served nor had merriment run so high. In the midst of the feast a messenger arrived at the castle, bearing the news that King Richard himself had reached England.

At once trustworthy messengers on swift horses were dispatched to bear to the king tidings of what had befallen at Lichester and, in the course of the next few weeks, returned with a message that set the hearts of all Lichester a thrill with excitement and pleasure, for great honor was to be done to the Lord of Lichester. The king himself was to visit the castle on his way to his own.

Cleanliness was never considered next to godliness in the days of old. A bath was the event of a

lifetime. Some people even considered water unhealthy. Bones and scraps of food were thrown down among the rushes that covered the floor of the great hall, and the same rushes remained upon the floor meal after meal. But now all was changed. All must be put in readiness for the coming of the king.

The dirty rushes were gathered up and disposed of to make room for the new sweet-smelling ones that were laid down in their stead. The long boards from which the knights were accustomed to eat were each scoured white with sand. Table-cloths were washed and spread out in the sun to bleach. New garments of most wonderful cut and color were designed for all the lords and ladies. The whole castle was alive with the preparations made in honor of the newly-returned king, and men, women, and children, from Lord Sibert himself down to the humblest stable boy, felt the responsibility and importance of the coming event.

All, with the notable exception of the two prisoners in the dungeon, were filled with joy at the honor which was about to be done Lichester. Anselm's face seemed lighted by the white flame of joy, for at last his task was reaching completion. Giles regarded his friend curiously.

The boy found himself wondering what the immediate future held for him. Twice a mysterious packet had been intrusted into his hands with the

instruction that, in case anything happened to Anselm, it should be taken to King Richard. He wondered what were the contents of this mysterious packet. Twice it had been placed in his charge, and well he knew that Anselm attached great importance to its safety, but of what it contained the boy was ignorant. He felt sure, however, that in some way the packet had something to do with his past, and perchance it held his future as well. Would Anselm give it to Richard himself, or was it only to be given to the king in case disaster fell upon Benedict of Lichester? Giles wondered.

"Even if that packet contains nothing about me," he thought, "and if I am only a peasant boy of humble parentage, I can be a knight inside."

The days sped quickly by like golden beads of happiness, each bringing nearer the day set for the coming of the king. It was fall. The leaves were turning crimson and gold, transforming the trees into fiery torches of welcome, as Millicent put it. Already the peasant people had returned from their hiding-places in the forest, and were feverishly at work raising new homes to take the place of those burned by the enemy.

Constant watch was kept upon the tower-crowned walls of Lichester, for it would never do for the king to come and find them unprepared. Sometimes the boys were allowed to take their turns as watchers for the king, and not a one of

them but wanted to be the one upon the wall when the king's retinue should be sighted.

Late one afternoon Giles, in the new garb of castle page, stood upon the wall looking intently to the east. Hills and woodlands swam in a many-colored haze before his eyes, but his mind was not on the beauty of fields and forests. Faint as elfin horns, from the far east came the sound of a horn. Giles started, then listened intently. So faint and far away had it sounded, that it seemed more like an echo or fairy horn to the listening lad. Again came the golden notes, this time nearer and clearer. Giles lifted his horn to his lips, glad now that this branch of his education had not been neglected. Again, for the third time, the call came, saying as plainly as if it had spoken the words, "Behold, the king cometh. Make ye ready to receive him."

Giles then blew a welcoming blast which was taken up by others on the wall. At this signal the courtyard seemed to bestir itself, as if awaking from slumber. Men hurried this way and that. A very few minutes later, with a protesting squeak and rattle, the drawbridge was lowered and the portcullis lifted. Across the bridge swept a gay cavalcade of the knights of Lichester, splendid in highly-polished armor that caught and reflected the rays of the sun in dazzling brilliance, and mounted on prancing chargers in trappings of blue and silver, crimson and gold. From his lofty posi-

tion upon the wall Giles watched the expert riding, with the same thrill of pleasure that he had felt before when he had seen the gay hunting-parties ride from Avalon.

He stayed upon the wall until the returning knights had almost reached the castle wall. Then he hurried to the courtyard to join Roger and Gurth, who were standing with the castle pages in a group. With a great shout and the ringing of little bells the knights swept into the yard of the castle. Never had Giles seen the like. The bravest men of all England were there, men who not only were of noble rank but men who had actually shown themselves to be brave and trustworthy as well. Giles's heart thrilled as he saw Anselm riding with so goodly a company.

Almost at once, he distinguished the king. No one could have mistaken that noble man for any one less in rank. He was taller than any of his companions and he bore himself as would a king. Gazing with the most intense admiration, the boy's keen eyes took note of his erect carriage, his piercing blue eyes, and his arms that seemed as strong as iron bands. Every line of the kingly figure proclaimed strength and courage to the group of admiring pages.

Then something unforeseen happened. One of the king's royal standards, carried by a young squire, slipped from the young man's grasp and

fell to the dusty courtyard. Just before its silken folds touched the ground a small figure darted between the prancing horses and caught it up. It was Roger who had saved the king's standard from being trampled upon beneath the horse's feet, and it was Roger who was now in danger of those same feet, for he had been kicked in the leg and had fallen, still holding fast, however, to the banner. He was lying almost under the horse's feet. Giles had seen the accident and, without thought of self, sprang forward, and seizing the horse's bridle, turned the beast aside.

Not many saw the incident and nothing was said of it at the time for Roger was not badly hurt, and the standard was uninjured, but the king's blue eyes had taken note of the matter. He looked keenly at the two boys who, in so simple and unassuming a manner, had showed their bravery.

"'Twas a brave deed most modestly done," he muttered to himself. "I will remember the lads."

It was not until the following morning that any reference was made to the recent happenings at Lichester. That night the inmates of the castle ate, drank, and made merry, while below in the dark dungeons far underground Lord Gillies cursed his foolishness in allowing his loyalty to waver from Richard to John. Alford gritted his teeth when he thought of his enemy Anselm high in the favor of the king and beyond his vengeance.

In gloomy foreboding the two men waited for the morrow—the day which was to seal their doom.

The following morning King Richard held court in the big gloomy hall of Lichester. Again Lord Sibert and his knights swore fealty to him, in meekest submission, owning him to be their master and king. So impressive a ceremony was it that Giles never forgot it, although what came afterward was much more spectacular and unbelievable. Sibert himself, on bended knee, placed his two hands between those of his king, swearing to him his loyalty and service.

When Gillies and Alford were brought before the stern-faced king, there came an account of the siege of Lichester Castle. In clear-cut sentences Sibert told of the building of the tower, his own inability to take charge of the siege, and of his brother's successful night attack. Alford's face grew black with rage upon hearing the praise lavished upon Anselm. At Richard's request, Anselm told of the attack and, to the unbounded joy of Giles, his friend called him forth and gave him credit for the plan which had met with such success. The boy's face flushed with embarrassment as the great king, Richard the Lion-Hearted himself, arose from the big chair and laid his hand upon the boy's shoulder, but Giles's eyes met those of the king fairly and trustfully.

"England needs such lads as you, my boy," said

King Richard. "Grow in wisdom and loyalty, that she may never call and find you wanting."

Again Alford's face was flushed with hate, for he had been informed that Giles was also the boy who had accompanied his niece in safety from Avalon, and he had noticed the glance of pride and affection that she gave him as he withdrew. No one noticed the swinging door nor seemed to see the humble peasant woman who entered the big hall. All were too intent upon what was going on about the king, for sentence was being made upon Lord Gillies. This fell heavily, for although his life was spared to him all his lands and wealth were declared forfeited to the crown. Part of his wealth was turned over to Lord Sibert as a recompense for the loss done to Lichester, while the rest was kept by the king. As for Gillies himself, he was given a certain number of days in which to leave England. Then Lord Alford was brought before the king.

"What charge is brought against this man?" asked the king sternly.

Anselm stepped forward. At the sight of his arch enemy, Alford's muscles tightened and, in spite of pain from his wound which had barely begun to heal, he made a powerful attempt to reach Anselm; but to no avail, for he was drawn back by his guards, cursing wildly.

"What grievance has this rascal against you,



"ENGLAND NEEDS SUCH LADS AS YOU, MY BOY," SAID KING RICHARD.—*Page 341.*

Benedict of Lichester?" said the king, turning to Anselm. Anselm, taking the small hand of the Lady Millicent into his own big one, led her forward.

"He is angered, Your Majesty, because I interfered with his plans to sell Lady Millicent of Avalon to outlaws, that he might assume ownership of her inheritance. He had always been a traitor, both to you and to your father before you. Twelve years ago he was outlawed. At the same time Roderick of Gaine was appointed guardian to the motherless and fatherless baby Millicent. When he died, Alford, with the approval of your brother John, took the guardianship, thus taking advantage of your absence. He made plans to sell her to outlaws. Giles and I found out those plans, frustrated them, and brought her here. This is the Lady Millicent of Avalon. Great wrong has been done to her. I ask for justice."

Lady Millicent dropped a deep curtsey and stood gazing trustfully into the regal face above her. The stern features softened involuntarily, for Lady Millicent, clad in her favorite blue with her curls a shower of gold upon her shoulders, was a winsome little lass; but there was trouble in his regard as well. This child was not fit to be mistress of a castle. She could neither prepare men for service nor defend her castle in case of an attack. Yet she was the only one that bore the old

name of Avalon. There was a hush throughout the room, as if every one felt that great matters hung in the balance.

"Again much credit is due to the boy, Giles, for it was he who made it possible to escape. Many times her life depended upon his wisdom and courage. Traveling as street-singers they came to Lichester. Later, when Lord Sibert's son was a prisoner in the hands of Alford and Gillies, it was Giles who rescued him. He led them a merry chase through the forest only to escape from their clutches at the end, that he might bring those at Lichester warning of Gillies's plans. It was he who suggested a secret night expedition," went on Anselm, much to Giles's embarrassment.

"A fine, fine lad," muttered Richard.

At this information Alford's face grew black with hatred, but this time the hatred was directed at Giles. To be foiled in his evil plans by so young a boy was galling to the proud man. To think that it was because of this simple peasant boy that he was now on trial for his life was infuriating. If looks were able to do bodily harm, no longer would there be a King Richard of England, a family of Lichester, or a peasant boy named Giles.

"Alford of Avalon shall be punished," said Richard sternly, "but," he added, turning to Anselm, "about giving the castle of Avalon into the slender hands of a girl-child, I am doubtful. She

would be unable to train men for my army or to defend her own castle in case of attack. I will provide for her. I, myself, will be her guardian and see that when she comes of proper age she will be married to one of high rank, but, as to Avalon, I must make other plans. You, Benedict of Lichester, have served me faithfully. I will give Avalon to you and knight you Lord of Avalon in return for the service that you have rendered me."

Tears welled into the eyes of the Lady Millicent, for since the capture of Lord Alford her hopes of regaining her beloved castle had run high. Much as she loved Uncle Anselm, it seemed hard that her castle should be given to one who was not of the name of Avalon. A curious smile came into Anselm's face, while Alford's grew even blacker with envy.

"I appreciate the generosity of Your Majesty," replied Anselm, "and I am grateful for the offer, but in case the Lady Millicent had been a boy would you not have appointed a guardian?"

"Had Lady Millicent been a boy she would have grown into a man who could both fight and prepare men for war. Time alone would have been needed to fit her for knighthood and being Lord of Avalon. Yes, would that she were a boy!"

Again Anselm smiled.

"In case she had a brother," he went on, "the castle would be given to him?"

"It would," replied Richard.

"Giles," called Anselm softly, "come to me."

Wonderingly, Giles stepped forward to his friend's side. Anselm then drew forward the Lady Millicent.

"Look well, O king," he said. As he spoke, he brushed the hair back from the foreheads of both children. "Can you not see a resemblance, both in feature and in coloring?" He turned to the Lady Constance. "You knew Lady Evelyn well, for you were her friend, my sister. Does not the likeness between this lad and your dead sister-in-law often startle you?"

"I noticed it from the first," replied Lady Constance steadily. "When first I saw Giles at the tavern as a wandering minstrel, I noted a likeness which I mentioned to my lord, Sibert."

"Let me tell you a story, Your Majesty," went on Anselm. "Times were troublous at Avalon twelve years ago, as well you remember. The very day that the Lady Millicent was born, her father was murdered by this man in the forest. The shock killed my sister, but before she died she sent a messenger for me. I could not come for I was lying at that time nearly dead at the old monastery of the good fathers. You all know that much of the story, but that is not all. Twins were born that night at the castle of Avalon and, because my sister was frightened by the thought that the

wicked Alford might be made guardian to her helpless little ones, she gave the boy-child to her own faithful nurse, telling her to hide him away and care for him for her sake. ‘Name him Giles, in honor of his dead father,’ she whispered to the old nurse. ‘In case my brother Anselm lives, give my little son to him. In case he is dead, take my baby to Sibert.’ I recovered, so the baby boy came into my charge. I brought him up in secret. This lad is **Giles of Avalon**, twin brother to Lady Millicent.”

There was a stunned silence, as if the hearers were momentarily paralyzed by this information. With mouth wide open in astonishment, Giles looked up at Anselm. There was a puzzled expression on the face of the Lady Millicent.

“Have you any proof of this wild tale?” gasped the king.

“My word of honor should be proof enough,” replied Anselm proudly, “for my word is to be trusted. Furthermore, I am willing to challenge any man that may doubt my word to a trial by combat, but wishing to convince Your Majesty beyond doubt, I have sent to Avalon for the one woman who can verify my statement.”

“Nanny,” gasped Lord Sibert, as the old woman stepped forward.

“Do you know the woman?” asked the king, in amazement.

"She was my old nurse, as she was nurse to my sister and my sister's children," replied Sibert, adding as an afterthought, "I have never known her to lie."

"Tell your tale, woman," said King Richard sternly, "and be truthful, or it will be the worse for you."

"The tale has been almost told, Your Majesty," replied Nanny. "After bidding me take the child into hiding, Lady Evelyn kissed his tiny face and cried a bit, poor dear. Then I took him from her arms, wrapped him in a soft white linen towel and laid him in a market-basket. My poor young lady died that very night, so I left the other baby in the charge of another nurse while I secreted the young lord of the castle in the hidden passage of Avalon. Anxious work it was, tending the two of them, and happy was I indeed when the younger brother of my lady took the care and weight from my shoulders."

Again a deep silence rested over those gathered before the king, for even more than it had been before came the realization that great matters swung in the balance. The king looked so steadily at Giles that the boy felt that every thought was open to his knowledge, yet Giles's answering regard did not waver in its intensity.

"Boy," said the king gravely, "if I make you master of Avalon, will you promise me here and

now that you will make it your life-work to right the wrong, follow loyally your king, and always love and cherish your sister, Millicent of Avalon?"

"Upon my word of honor, I will always love and cherish my sister Millicent, whom I have already loved since first I swore fealty to her in the cave at Avalon. Anselm has always seemed to me a perfect knight, so I promise to take him for my model in all things knightly, and lastly I promise to loyally serve my king."

"Well spoken, my lad," said the king heartily. "And now, though you are but a lad, I want you to swear fealty to me as these others have done."

In almost a daze, Giles obeyed. Things were happening altogether too rapidly for him to keep pace with. He, the lord of the castle and owner of Avalon, brother of the high-born little Lady Millicent! It was incredible, merely a highly-colored beautiful dream. He stole a glance at the group of pages, as he rose to his feet. Their faces showed that they rejoiced in his good fortune. As he returned to Anselm, Millicent slipped her hands into his.

"I am so happy that I do not know how to contain myself," she whispered to him. "I have been wanting a brother like you ever since I met you on the mountainside."

"Anselm," said Richard, kindly indicating the

two children, "you have been a good friend to these young people so, into your hands, I commend their future. I know that you will deal fairly with them, for when you might have taken Avalon as a gift from me you refused it, turning it over to the hands of its rightful owners. You will make a wise and loving guardian to these young relatives of yours."

Late that evening Anselm stood out in the court-yard with an arm about both Giles and Millicent. His quest was at an end, and his heart was filled with peace.

"Look, Anselm," said Giles, suddenly pointing to a particularly bright star in the heavens, "there is my star. The coat of arms of Avalon is now my coat of arms for I am of the house of Avalon, but it is incomplete without my star. I want you to add it to the family crest, for it is a reminder to me that even a peasant can be a knight within if he aims at a star."

THE END



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